GRACE ALL SUFFICIENT

A Study In The Background, Life And Teaching Of Jesus

"And he said unto me, My grace is sufficient for thee: for my strength is made perfect in weakness. Most gladly therefore will I rather glory in my infirmities, that the power of Christ may rest upon me." —II Cor. 12:9

FENTER DEE NORTHERN
-317 E. Adams, Kosciusko, MS-

© Copyright 1996 by Fenter Dee Northern

First printing, 1996
This printing, 2,000 copies
Cover graphics, Fenter Northern
Proofreading, Barbara Oliver

Published by
J. C. Choate Publications
Box 72
Winona, MS 38967

Phone: 601-283-1192
Fax 601-283-1191

A STATEMENT FROM THE PUBLISHER

I am especially happy to be able to publish this book here in the United States. I say this because I know the author and count him as a faithful gospel preacher and personal friend.

I first met Fenter D. Northern in the early 1960's in Ruleville, MS. In his work as a gospel preacher in the Lord's church he has labored in Illinois, Arkansas, Oklahoma, Texas and New Mexico. For ten years he served as Academic Dean at Magnolia Bible College in Kosciusko, MS. Although retired now from that position, he still serves the college on a part-time basis as a member of the adjunct faculty. He preaches for the Church of Christ in Winona, MS.

Brother Northern has lectured at a number of Christian Colleges, flies his own plane, enjoys working with his computer, and is a staff writer for the Voice of Truth International.

Thank you Brother Northern, for sharing your studies and class notes with each of us, in this publication.

J. C. Choate
Winona, MS/New Delhi, India

PREFACE

The material you are about to read is a result of many years of study, mission work, preaching the Gospel, workshops, prayer and teaching the wonderful good news of Jesus our Lord. Jesus said: "*Every scribe which is instructed unto the kingdom of heaven is like unto a man that is a householder, which bringeth forth out of his treasure things new and old*" (Matt. 13:52). Later, Paul said the Gospel is a treasure God has placed in "*earthen vessels that the excellency of the power may be of God, and not of us*" (II Cor. 4:7). This was Paul's estimation of the Gospel for which he gladly gave his life. The important question of the hour is: Is it ours?

I invite you to a treasure hunt more exciting than you can imagine. If you will diligently pursue the following study in the teaching of Jesus through to its end, you will find wonder upon wonder and every wonder true.

As you study, pray the prayer Elisha prayed for his servant in Dothan in II Kings 6:17: "*O Lord, I pray thee, open his* [my] *eyes that he* [I] *may see.*" The inspired writer said: "*Eye hath not seen, nor ear heard, neither hath it entered into the heart of man, the things which God hath prepared for them that love him*" (I Cor. 2:9).

If this volume can only slightly enhance someone's spiritual vision, enabling them to better understand the blessed light of our Saviour's wonderful grace, if just one person is led to say with the previously blind man in John 9, "*One thing I know, that whereas I was blind, now I see,*" all the years of hard study gone into this volume will be well worth the effort.

I now join Paul in his prayer for the Ephesian Christians for each reader of this volume: "*That the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of glory, may give unto you the spirit of wisdom and revelation in the knowledge of him: the eyes of your understanding being enlightened; that ye may know what is the hope of his calling, and what the riches of the glory of his inheritance in the saints, . . . And to know the love of Christ, which passeth knowledge, that ye might be filled with all the fulness of God. And what is the exceeding greatness of his power to usward who believe . . .*" (Eph. 1:17-19; 3:19).

Fenter Dee Northern, April 1996

DEDICATION

To all the young men and women who have attended my classes through the years and have gone out to serve the Lord,

to those in my family who encouraged me to preach and have now gone on to their reward,

and to those mentioned below who remain temporarily with me this side of glory and continue to be a constant source of encouragement:

Sue,
Kathy,
Johnnie,
Bernice,
Robert and Mary Ellen,
Paul and Marilyn.

FORWARD

For smoother reading many textual references are footnoted and placed at the close of the chapter. In other instances where it was felt that the reader may appreciate help more quickly, references are given in context. Keep in mind that on those pages where the text is broken by graphics, the flow of the text at the graphic continues at the top of the second column rather than below the graphic.

Unless otherwise noted, all quotations are from the King James version of the Bible. Brackets are used occasionally to designate personal emphases.

A tome given in the Supplementary Readings section does not indicate that complete work is endorsed by this author.

Special appreciation is extended to Dallas Lockhart, fellow gospel preacher, and Barbara Oliver with J. C. Choate Publications, for their help in preparing the manuscript.

"There is a river, the streams whereof shall make glad the city of God, the holy place of the tabernacles of the Most High."

Psalm 46:4

CONTENTS

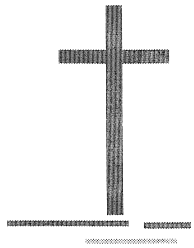
CHAPTER		PAGE
1.	Jesus: The Miracle of the Ages	9
2.	The Origin of the Gospel Narratives	31
3.	Preexistence, Birth and Early Years	51
4.	The Friend of the Bridegroom	67
5.	The Wilderness Temptation	85
6.	The Early Months of Jesus' Ministry	107
7.	The Kingdom Draws Near	127
8.	The Training of the Twelve	141
9.	The Sermon on the Mount	157
10.	Matthew 8: A Preview of the Coming Kingdom	169
11.	How Jesus Taught	183
12.	The Amazing Discovery	195
13.	The Second Phase of Christ's Ministry	207
14.	Jesus and Forgiveness	219
15.	Christ's Ministry of Healing	231
16.	Jesus and Daily Life	241
17.	The Great I Am	251
18.	Nearing the Cross	263
19.	O Jerusalem, Jerusalem	275
20.	Jesus Arrested and Condemned	291
21.	Triumph Out of Defeat	303
22.	Grace All Sufficient	319

Outline for Chapter One

Jesus: The Miracle of the Ages

I. God's Season of Readiness Arrives
   A. Man's chronic impatience with God
      1. Sarah's impatience
      2. Faith is righteousness with God
      3. Was impatience Judas' problem?
      4. Peter warns all against impatience with God
   B. Why God waited for so many centuries to send Christ
      1. It took a great amount of time for pagan religions to run their course and lose their influence
      2. These religions, as well as the philosophies of man, offered no healing for the hurts of men's hearts.

II. The Fullness of Time
   A. Palestine
   B. Hebrew events
      1. God's prophets were being strategically located
      2. How the Jews survived in Babylon
      3. Changes that kept Judah united
         a. Putting away idolatry helped preserve Judaism
         b. The rise of the synagogue was a cohesive factor
         c. They instituted a merit system for keeping the law
         d. The rise of the influential scholarly class helped
         e. The binding of traditional interpretation began
         f. Additional revelation was received
         g. Cyrus permitted the Jews to return to Palestine
         h. The Jews under Greek rule
         i. The Maccabbean revolt
         j. Early sects
      4. Jewish dispersion acquires a new meaning
      5. How the Jewish dispersion aided the arrival of Christianity
   C. Greek Contributions
   D. Rome's Contributions
   E. Eschatological Literature
   F. John the Baptist, God's herald, arrives



Chapter One

Jesus: The Miracle of the Ages!

Wherewith He was want at
Heaven's high council table
To sit in the midst of tribal unity,
He laid hands aside and here,
With us to be,
Forsook the courts of
Everlasting day
And chose with us a darksome
House of clay.
—John Milton

1. GOD'S SEASON OF READINESS ARRIVES

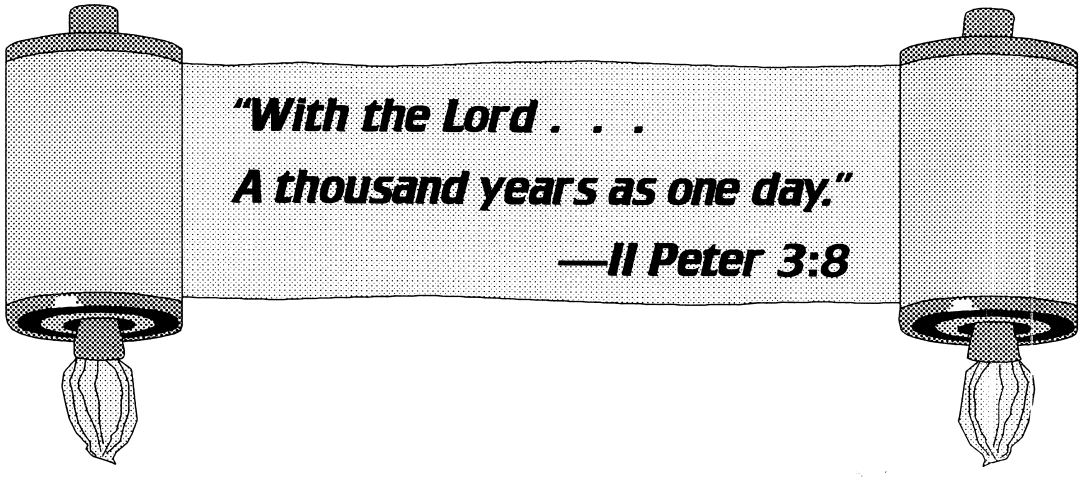
"To everything there is a season, and a time for every purpose under heaven."
—Eccl. 3:1

"But when the fullness of time was come, God sent forth his son." —Gal. 4:4

For nearly two millenniums God's people waited in thrilling expectation for Jehovah to fulfill his sacred promise to send the Deliverer to Israel. Every faithful home having little Jewish maidens cherished the fond hope that the fruit of their daughter's womb would bring the blessed Messiah into the world. Finally, after centuries during which God was preparing the world, their hope was justified in the fruition of his divine promise.

Jesus' arrival into the world has been eloquently expressed by many writers, but the following quote graphically and beautifully describes the event: *"The coming of our Lord has been called the miracle of the ages. The amazing grace which overflowed from heaven to earth sending the eternal Word of God to take the form of man was miraculous, not only in the virgin birth, but in the wonder of its entirety.*

"Our hearts continually echo the words to the song: Why did my Saviour come to earth, And to the humble go? Why did he choose a lowly birth? . . . and the only possible answer is: because he loved me so!"[1] Historically, man has demonstrated his impatience with God. However, Jehovah executes his plans *"according to the foreknowledge of God"* (I Pet. 1:2). This means God sees history at a glance. There is not a single moment in history when he is not in complete control of his plans. This is very difficult for man to understand.



A. Man's chronic impatience with God!

Even great faith people as Sarah and Abraham have grown impatient waiting for God to keep his promises.

1. Sarah's Impatience.

Four millenniums ago Sarah, the beautiful but aging wife of Abraham, grew tired of waiting for God to fulfill the wonderful promise he had made to her husband. Regardless of her advanced age, God had promised to bless them with an heir in spite of her sterility. About one-half century of married life had passed without a single heir to inherit the family blessing. Sheer frustration set in for a wife whose society glorified women for giving their husbands a prodigious posterity. Years flashed by in their rapidly advancing age. Why did God wait longer to give them an heir? After an eternal decade rolled by Sarah grew anxious. She felt God had taken too much time to fulfill his promise. Something was wrong. Perhaps Abraham had misunderstood the Almighty. That's what it was, they had misunderstood. God intended for them to adopt a child fathered by Abraham and a younger woman.

One would think that they would have consulted God—to have prayed about the matter. But Sarah fell upon a plan that had guaranteed results. Abraham could have a baby by her handmaid who would become their legal heir according to Hittite law. The plan was so sure to work it must have been God's intention all along. This would explain the delay. The problem was not with God; it was in their hermeneutic. She convinced Abraham of her new interpretation of God's word and he quickly fell for it. Sin lurks at the threshold of every heart motivated by impatience. Impatience breeds doubt and doubt begins to seek a new interpretation of God's word tailored to one's restless desires (II Pet 1:20). Running before God nearly wrecked their home. It has wrought havoc among the mid-eastern nations throughout history and now threatens to spill over into global conflict.

2. Faith is Righteousness with God.

Although Sarah had aged far beyond her years of child-bearing, Abraham "believed God," which was reckoned as righteousness (Genesis 15:6). Centuries later Habakkuk recorded: "*The just shall live by faith.*" This eternal principle also verifies our being right with God through faith by believing that Jesus was the promised heir which would bless all nations. The thought of such a miracle in their posterity made Abraham and Sarah ecstatic. How extremely happy this

ancient couple was when at last God dispatched three angels in the likeness of men who finally set the actual date for the heir to be born. Meanwhile Ishmael, Abraham's son by Hagar, had been born. This eventually created jealousy between the two women causing the family to split. This generated a feud among these kinfolk that has raged throughout history.

Impatience was only one in a legion of sins in the Old Testament that Satan used to try to prevent Christ's entrance in the world.

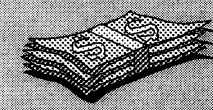
3. Was impatience Judas' problem?

It is said that impatience with Jesus was the principal motive in Judas Iscariot's betrayal. The noted commentator, William Barclay, places Judas among those who sin through impatience; that he presumed to act selfishly to force the divine hand. Others claim to see this in Judas' character. The idea expressed is: this disciple had grown extremely impatient with his Master because he felt the Lord had delayed too long in fulfilling his promise to establish the kingdom. Therefore, Judas in extreme impatience, acted in his demeaning manner to force Christ's hand to take immediate action to establish the new order. In his act of betrayal Barclay says Judas was really saying to Jesus: *"Now is your chance to act, blast them with your power!"*[2] This position seems extremely shallow and to ignore plain facts. James S. Stewart comments appropriately as follows:

> *But it will not hold water. It represents . . . In place of Judas the traitor it givers us Judas the misguided saint. Instead of a double-dyed crime it speaks of an error in judgment. There is not a scrap of evidence for this in the Gospels. It is quite inconsistent with the words of stern condemnation which Jesus used about this disciple's deed . . . Woe to that man by whom the Son of Man is betrayed!.*[3]

What will a man give in exchange for his soul?

Riches?



like the rich ruler? (Matt. 19)

A bowl of beans?

like Esau? (Gen. 25)

Thirty pieces of silver?

like Judas? (Matt. 27)

A herd of pigs?

like the Gergesenes? (Matt. 8)

A traditional religion?

like those in Jno. 6?

Love for the World?

like Demas in II Tim. 4:10

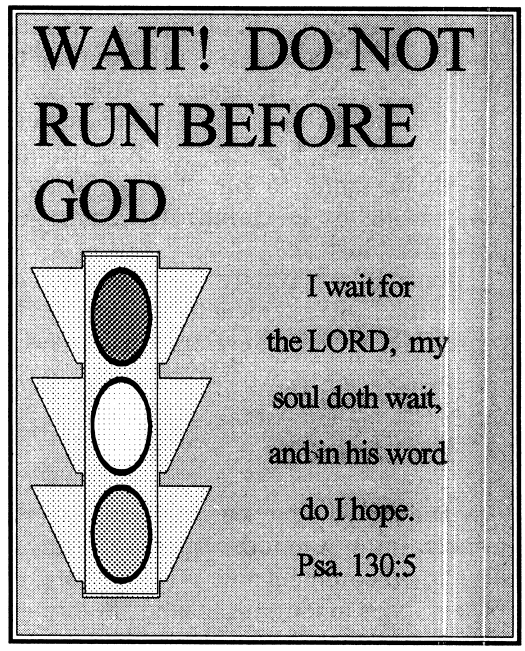
4. Peter warns all against becoming impatient with God.

Peter sternly rebukes all who lose their patience with God (2 Pet. 3:8). At the time of his writing (ca. 63 A. D.), many had begun to scoff at the second coming of Jesus, saying: "*Where is the promise of his coming?*" Like Sarah of old who had grown impatient waiting for the promise of God to be fulfilled, some in Peter's lifetime had also grown impatient waiting for Jesus to keep his promise to return. Peter answered the impatient

scoffers in his day with these words:

Knowing this first, that there shall come in the last days scoffers, walking after their own lusts, and saying, where is the promise of his coming? for since the fathers fell asleep, all things continue as they were from the beginning of the creation. For this they willingly are ignorant of, that by the word of God the heavens were of old, and the earth standing out of the water and in the water: whereby the world that then was, being overflowed with water perished: but, beloved be not ignorant of this one thing, that one day is with the Lord as a thousand years, and a thousand years as one day. The Lord is not slack concerning his promise as some men count slackness; but is longsuffering to us-ward, not willing that any should perish, but that all should come to repentance. But the day of the Lord will come as a thief in the night; in the which the heavens shall pass away with a great noise, and the elements shall melt with fervent heat, the earth also and the works that are therein shall be burned up. Seeing then that all these things shall be dissolved, what manner of persons ought ye to be in all holy conversation and godliness, looking for and hasting unto the coming of the day of God, wherein the heavens being on fire shall melt with fervent heat? Nevertheless we, according to his promise, look for a new earth, wherein dwelleth righteousness. Wherefore, beloved, seeing that ye look for such things, be diligent that ye may be found of him in peace, without spot, and blameless in his sight.

2 Pet. 3:3-14.



B. Why God waited for many centuries

A basic part of Christian faith is belief in the omniscience of God. Christians believe that God knows both what to do and when to do it. A point of acute readiness for great historical events can be reached. This has given birth to many movements that would have been otherwise suppressed. Note the following remark by Victor Hugo:

"Greater than the tread of mighty armies is an idea whose time has come." [4]

Ignorant as the world was of the preparations taking place throughout the rolling centuries in the pre-Christian era, the divine hand gradually forged history together making

the moment of the Messiah's birth the most opportune and effective hour for the success of Christianity. Like slowly merging clouds, historic events were preparing showers of heavenly blessings to fall upon a scorched earth. The rise and fall of national governments in the 600 years preceding Christ had left a legacy of social impact that assisted the establishment of Christianity.

When all things reached the precise point of readiness, Jesus was born. Paul expressed this unique moment in these words: "*But when the fullness of time was come, God sent forth his Son, made of a woman, made under the law . . .*" (Gal. 4:4). Just as Jesus spoke of an essential watching and preparation necessary before his second advent (Matt. 25), centuries of preparation were also needed before his first arrival.[5]

This agonizing waiting was essential for at least two reasons: (1) It took a great amount of time for the vain pagan religions to run their course and lose their influence upon Israel. (2) These religions, as well as the philosophies of man, offered no healing for the hurts of men's hearts.

Pagan religions favored appeasement to their gods while pondering the origin of truth and groping for direction. Everywhere hearts ached for forgiveness. This provided the perfect open door for God to bring Christ, the way, the truth, and the light into a darkened world. Many souls awaited God's message of love and grace in Jesus.

11. THE FULLNESS OF TIME

GENESIS 49:10; MARK 1:15; JOHN 1:14; GALATIANS 4:4

A. Palestine

It was Roman year 749 when the fullness of time was reached in the divine purpose for entry of Christianity into the world. Below are listed some of the historic events which made this season the precise hour for God to break most effectively into man's history and establish his New Covenant. It was also a perfect hour that lent great assistance against the staggering odds facing the new religion.

The middle east was a strategic place for the beginning of Christianity; even the geography of Palestine was perfect to serve as its nurturing cradle.

Palestine, or the Holy Land as it is now commonly called, provided a hub that joined together the three great continents of Europe, Africa and Asia. For centuries the great powers of Assyria, Babylon, Egypt and Greece had fought for possession of this territory.

They felt its location would provide them with a strategic buffer zone. Defense strategists within the surrounding nations believed this narrow mountainous strip of land sprawling eastward from the western banks of the Mediterranean to a short distance beyond the Jordan River to be vital to their national security. They believed it provided an excellent first line of defense.

Being a heartland where the east and west met, and due to its frequent swapping of national allegiances through the centuries, this "land of the purple"[6] presented a mixing bowl of cultures. Many trading routes crisscrossed this area from India and Babylon in the east, to the large Mediterranean ports of Tyre and Sidon in the west where cargoes were loaded for ship lanes to Rome and Spain. Southward there was Persia, Ethiopia and Egypt, and in the north lay the prosperous cities of Asia Minor.

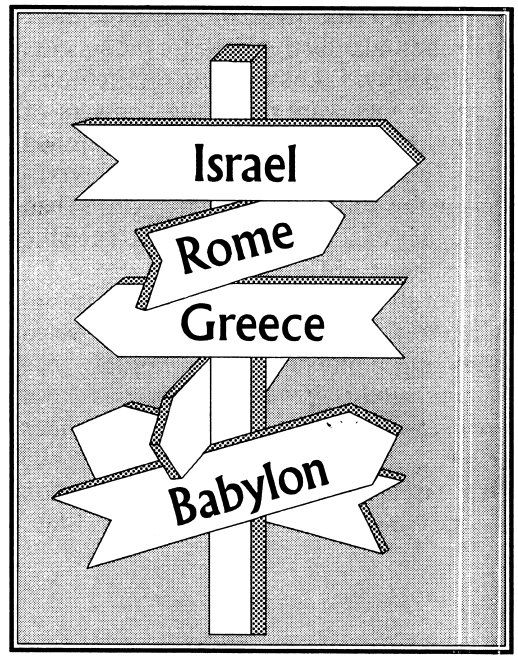
Through commercial arteries in these districts flowed new ideas and philosophies as well as exotic religions. Ethnic groups representing various cultures mingled in trading caravans. This provided an excellent

opportunity for sharing new learning. No accident or random chance brought the birth of Jesus to this area. Divine wisdom utilized this geographic and commercial phenomenon to fulfill Old Testament prophecy. Here, in ancient Canaan near the geographical center of the entire earth, the Almighty in the season of his choice fulfilled his promise to bring the Messiah into the world. In the wisdom of God this was the perfect beacon spot in all the earth to radiate the saving Light of eternal salvation in a benighted world.

B. Hebrew Events

God had warned the Jews that their national independence depended upon obedience to his word. According to Moses in Leviticus 26:33, if they disobeyed God they would be scattered among the nations. Also, their inherited land would become desolate and their cities laid waste. The word "scatter" in this text is from the Greek word *diaspora* meaning to cast abroad, like a farmer scatters his seed while sowing.

Deportation of the Jews from their homeland began as early as 721 B.C. when the northern kingdom of Israel was carried away into captivity by the Assyrian armies (II Kgs. 17). Later, in 606 B.C., Nebuchadnezzar of Babylon came against Jehoiakim at Jerusalem reducing the southern kingdom of Judea to a vassal state.[7] After three years, the puppet king rebelled, which brought the armies of Babylon against him. Following Jehoiakim's death, the Babylonians gave Jehoichin, Jehoiakim's son, charge over Jerusalem affairs.



1. God's prophets were being strategically located.

At the time of the first captivity, Nebuchadnezzar's armies carried to Babylon many of the noble youths including the illustrious prophet Daniel. Here he served God continuously in the great city. Ezekiel, deported ten years later, became God's prophet in the hinterland. Those remaining behind in occupied Jerusalem needed a strong and courageous minister, so Jeremiah was permitted to remain in the homeland.

Due to his prophecies concerning the fall of Jerusalem, Jeremiah became tremendously unpopular. The Jewish authorities considered him a traitor and persecuted him severely because he told

Ignorant as the governing powers may have been of the coming of Christ, and as self-serving as their civil projects were, God was using them all the while to prepare the way for Christianity.

A Brief Chronology of Some Old Testament Events

721 B.C. ..... Fall of the kingdom of Israel

626-580 B.C. ..... The prophecy of Jeremiah

606 B.C. ..... First captivity to Babylon (Daniel taken)

597 B.C. ..... Second captivity (Ezekiel taken)

599-572 B.C. ..... Ezekiel ministers to the captives.

586 B.C. ..... Jerusalem and the Temple destroyed. (The end of old Judaism)

them their beloved city would be destroyed due to their grievous sin of idolatry. This type of preaching—reminding people of their sins and declaring the judgment of God for such—is unpopular in any age even though it is an essential part of his word. "*Prophesy unto us smooth things, prophesy deceit,*" was the demand from Israel to Isaiah in Isaiah 30:10. Later in the New Testament, Paul said many had "itching ears" who desired to hear fables rather than the true Gospel (II Tim. 4:1-4). Private doctrines concerning Christianity are commonplace today making it obvious that many are yet afflicted with the same malady. Appealing to the "consumer-oriented public" makes it an extremely contagious and malevolent disease that rages in epidemic proportions.

Three months after the first deportation to Babylon, Jehoichin rebelled against Nebuchadnezzar. This brought Babylon's armies back again to the city of David. This time the Jewish king was taken captive along with a second group numbering about 10,000. The mighty prophet Ezekiel was deported to Babylon with this second deportation in 597 B.C. He served as a minister and prophet to God's people in a Jewish colony on the river Chebar, east of Nippur.

God was gradually placing his prophets in strategic places to nurture the remnant of "faith people" during the seventy years of slavery in Babylon. At the second deportation, Mattaniah, Jehoichin's uncle, also known as Zedekiah, was left in charge of Jerusalem but he also soon rebelled. This time Nebuchadnezzar was determined to put an end to the stubborn Jewish city. In 586 B.C. his armies entered the city destroying both it and the Temple with fire. Most of the population were deported to Babylon. It is believed at this time that Jeremiah was carried to Egypt against his will by a small remnant of Jews who fled the city. This was the third captivity and marked the end of the kingdom of Judah.

2. How Judaism survived in Babylon.

The fall of Jerusalem and the removal of the Jews from their homeland brought many changes to Judaism. The vanquished Jews marched into Babylonian captivity with cherished memories of their historic homeland. They began their exiles with their hearts burning with the prophecies of Isaiah, Micah, Habakkuk, and Jeremiah now being vividly fulfilled in stark penal realities. With all hope gone in themselves, they will learn complete dependency upon God and the absolute worthlessness of idols. They also took with them their Holy Scrolls and acquired a far deeper respect for the true prophets.

3. Changes that kept Judah united (586 B.C.).

The northern 10 tribes had been swept into Assyrian oblivion 135 years earlier. Several factors, however, preserved Judaism from Babylon absorption.

(a) *Putting away their idolatrous practices helped preserve Judah.* The rigors of the captivity along with experiencing the prophet's blazing prophecies of the judgment of God for disobedience brought a powerful national rejection of idolatry. They now felt more than anything else that it was the worship of the pagan gods that brought them to this painful and embarrassing hour of slavery. They learned their lesson painfully, but well. Bowing to pagan idols has never presented a problem to the Jews since.

(b) *The rise of the Synagogue was a cohesive factor.* Unable to return to Jerusalem to offer sacrifices, the Jews replaced worship with local synagogues (where there were more than 10 families in a locality). Having a place of assembly where all could be encouraged and reminded of their covenant relationship with God played a vital role in preventing them from experiencing the plight of their northern brethren in Assyria. The synagogue also served as a cultural center as well as a town hall.

(c) *They instituted a "merit system" for keeping the law.* Without a king, the high priest functioned as a puppet head of state. Unable to offer sacrifices at the Temple any longer, they fell upon the practice of obtaining righteousness by rigorously keeping the Mosaical law. While well meaning, it grew into a system whereby one merited righteousness by works. Centuries later when he wrote the Roman and Galatian letters, Paul said that the mercy of God was void if righteousness came by the law. A clear passage denouncing salvation by merit is found in Ephesians 2:8-9: "*For by grace you have been saved through faith; and this is not your own doing, it is the gift of God—not because of works, lest any man should boast*" (RSV).

(d) *The rise of the influential scholarly class helped preserve the Jews in Babylon.* "Merit salvation" demanded professional scholars who gave themselves to constant study, interpretation and instruction in the Mosaical code. These men were known as scribes and rabbis. They came to be regarded with great reverence and wielded strong influence among the people. They supplied a critical need during the bleak days of Jewish history after the loss of the Temple and the holy city. Regrettably, as scholars are too frequently prone to do, they became very proud and intolerant, placing little emphasis upon the grace of God for the impoverished believer. With such ideas, they were destined for many clashes with Jesus.

Although Israel defiled their own Temple by merchandising the sacrifices, the demand for rigid observance of the law did help keep Judaism together and alive during some of its darkest hours.

Therefore, as practiced in the days of Jesus, Judaism was largely a product of the Babylonian exile. Before their exile, the Jews gave little more than lip service to belief in the one God who made heaven and earth. They persisted in idolatry despite continuous warnings and urgent pleadings from their courageous prophets. Jesus accused them of killing the prophets, a practice in league with their fathers (Matt. 23:31-32).

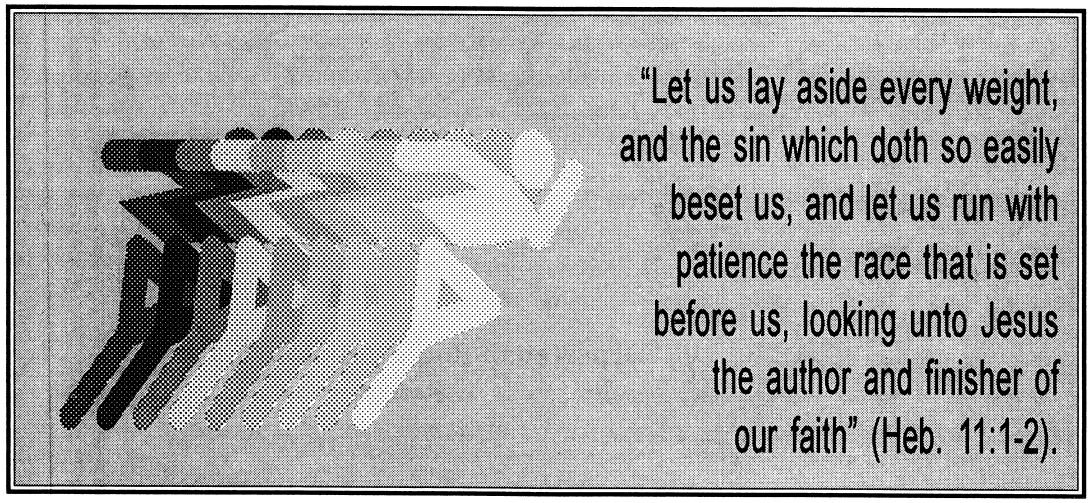
Due to wholesale idolatrous practices the northern ten tribes already had been absorbed by the Assyrians. Idolatrous worship had been imported by Solomon's foreign wives. This played a large roll in the politics of the divided kingdom after his death. However, Jezebel, the wicked wife of King Ahab in the 9th century B.C., proved to be the most evangelistic pagan of the times while her faithless husband looked the other way.

Whatever may be said about the enormity of Israel's sins during Ahab's administration goes doubly for the southern Kingdom of Judah. This is especially true during the 7th century B.C. reign of Manasseh and Amon. During this time, the worship of Jehovah had been barely kept alive during the 8th century by such valiant men of God as Elijah and Josiah. Yet, when the Hebrews were swept away into the burning social furnace of the Chaldeans, they were faced with the imminent danger of both political and religious disintegration.

The southern Jews faced an impossible dilemma. Either they must sternly discipline themselves by strict observance of the law, thereby producing a meaningful worship of Jehovah according to the revelation of the prophets, or face complete dissolution like their sister Israel to the north. The intense discipline reflected in the Book of Daniel reveals the wise choice they made.

(e) *The binding of traditional interpretation began.* The scribes and the rabbis decided the keeping of their interpretation of the law was as essential as the law itself. They wrote volumes describing how the Sabbath Day was to be kept holy. These meticulous rules became tremendously excessive and burdensome. Jesus publicly denounced "the tradition of the elders" saying, "*You make void the law by your traditions.*" In Matthew 23 he pronounced seven woes against those who set aside the spirit of the law for legalism and external righteousness.

(f) *Additional revelation was received.* The prophecies of Daniel and Ezekiel were added to the Old Testament Scriptures as well as many of the Psalms (Psalms 85, 102, 118, 146-150 being examples). I and II Kings may have been finished during this period. These writings, the instruction in the local synagogues, the exemplary lives of such courageous faithful as the three Hebrew children recorded in Daniel, coupled with the Jews' rugged determination for survival gradually forged a new Judaism into existence. This Judaism was interpreted, influenced and led by the deeply respected and scholarly scribes.



538-537 B.C.

(g) *Cyrus permitted the Jews to return to Palestine.* After the fall of Babylon in 538 B.C. Cyrus, the conquering Persian monarch, issued an edict in the first year of his reign permitting all Jews who so desired to return to their homeland. He even financed the rebuilding of their Temple. Happy as they were to have the new Temple in Jerusalem, it was so much inferior to Solomon's structure it caused the elderly Jews who remembered it to weep (Ezra 3:12).

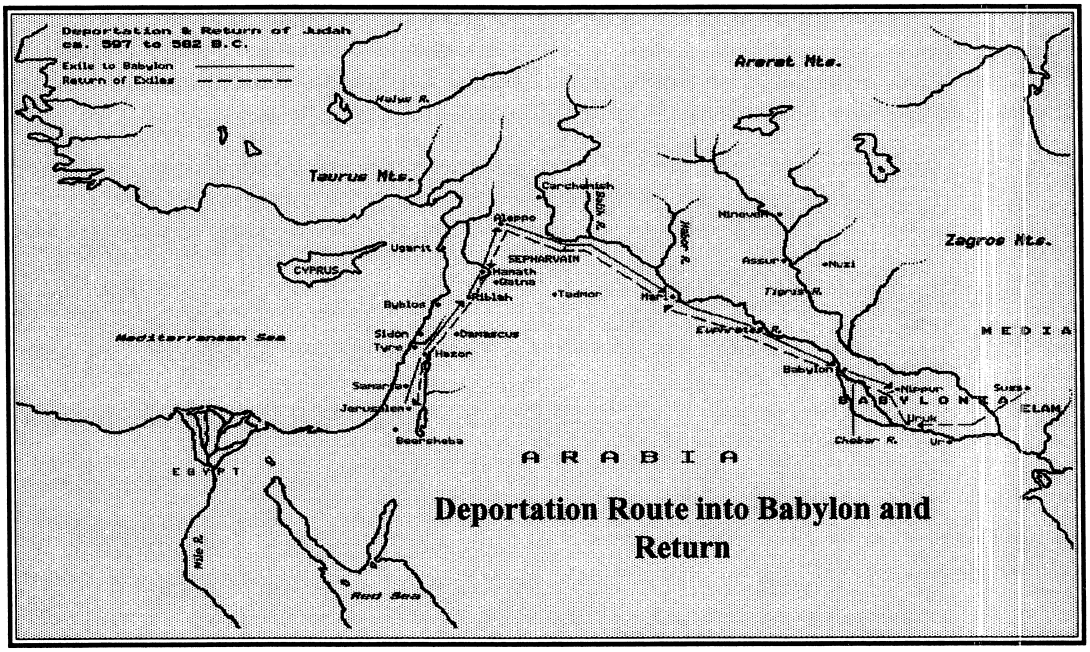
Only about fifty thousand of the refugees chose to return from exile. This was only a small portion of the Jews in Babylon at this time (Ezra 2:64-65). Those remaining chose to stay with their families and to work at occupations in the land they had considered their home for the past seventy years. These "Babylonian Jews" were the most orthodox scholars in Judaism and became astute businessmen. Their acquired professional acumen has continued through the centuries.

300-142 B.C.

(h) *The Jews under the Greek rule.* After the death of Alexander the Great—who conquered the entire mid-eastern world—his generals divided the empire among themselves. After many disputes over territory and wars between the Ptolomies and the Seleucids, the Jewish homeland fell under the domination of the Seleucids.

During this period Jewish religious persecution rose to a peak under the reign of Antiochus IV. In his administration the Greeks plundered the Temple and proceeded to convert it into a shrine for Zeus. Incensed at this, the Jews rebelled under the leadership of a patriotic Maccabbean family.

This policy of provocation was undertaken by this infamous tyrant who took the name of Epiphanes, meaning *the illustrious*. Repulsed by his arrogance, the Jews refused to pronounce it Epiphanes, but rather said, "Epimanes," which meant *the madman.* An example of what earned him this title occurred when he presumed to sacrifice a sow upon the Temple altar. This was a frightening nightmare, a stark blasphemy that intensely insulted the Jews. Following this, Jewish sacrifices were proscribed while pagan altars were erected in many villages. Death was ordered for those caught reading the Torah. The Sabbath and circumcision were also banned.



166 B.C.

(i) *The Maccabbean revolt.* The older and more orthodox Jews, such as Mattathias, an elderly priest from the village of Modin, could not tolerate such extreme provocation. When the old priest was ordered to sacrifice a pig to the heathen gods, he adamantly refused; and when a young Jew presumed to comply with the blasphemous order, Mattathias quickly drew his sword and slew the young Jew and the king's envoy as well. As a result of this confrontation, Mattathias and his five sons destroyed the altar and immediately fled to the mountains to avoid the repercussions which were certain to follow. They were joined by many other patriotic and orthodox Jews. From the Judean hills they launched a stolid resistance movement against the hated Seleucidae.[8]

The Maccabbean revolt drew its name from Judas Maccabbeaus, the third son of Mattathias. Due to his highly successful guerilla tactics against the Syrians, he was given the name Maccabbeaus, meaning the hammer, or hammerheaded.

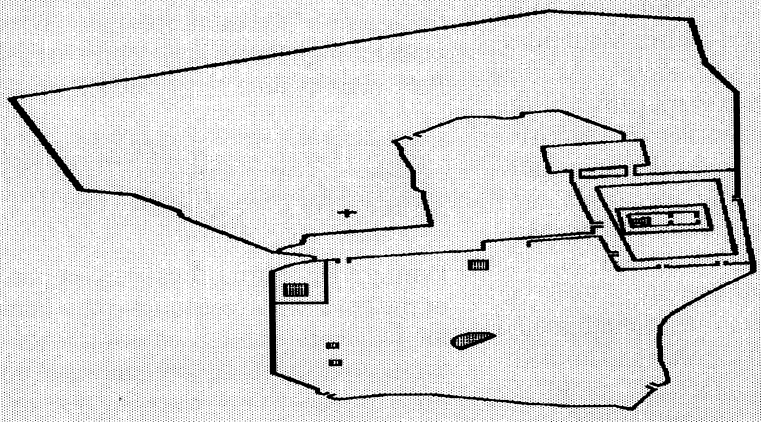
(j) *Early sects.* (I Mac. 2:42)[9] The Hasidim has an obscure beginning dating from an earlier period than the Maccabbees. They were a religious sect within Judaism with an intense devotion for the Torah and would quickly die for its defense. They seem to be the ancestors of the Pharisees and perhaps the Essenes as well, although the latter is still debated. According to I Maccabbees, they were "mighty warriors of Israel," and extremely militant in defense of their beliefs. Under the able leadership of Judas, the revolt was successful in restoring religious freedom. A short time later under the leadership of two of Judas' brothers, Jonathan and Simon, Israel became once again a national power in the area by winning its independence from Syria. After several years of turmoil within the ruling Hasmonian house, especially between Aristobulus II and Hyrcanus II (142-63 B.C.), followers of the latter surrendered Jerusalem to the Roman general Pompey. The general forced Aristobulus, the leader of the more recalcitrant Jews, to walk through Rome in a victory march in 61 B.C. once again ending Jewish freedom.

4. Jewish dispersion acquires new meaning.

During all this turmoil and persecution many of the Jews continued to flee their homeland to find more tranquil environments where they could dwell and pursue their occupations in peace. This scattering outflow from the Jews' homeland had grown to a great magnitude by the time of the Roman occupation. Alfred Edersheim remarks of this:

> *The majority of the nations constituted what was known as the dispersion; a term which, however, no longer expressed its original meaning of banishment by the judgment of God, since absence from Palestine was now entirely voluntary. But all the more that it referred not to outward suffering, did its continued use indicate a deeper feeling of religious sorrow, of social isolation, and of political strangership in the midst of a heathen world.*
> —*Alfred Edersheim*[10]

The dispersion began as a divine penalty for disobedience. In later years after the captivity, the Jews, seeking to improve their economy and to flee one sort of persecution or another, migrated into all nations. The Jewish dispersion became so pronounced by the first century that Josephus said there was "*no nation in the world which had not among them part of the Jewish people.*" He attributed this to the nation's being "widely dispersed over all the world among its inhabitants."[11]



Old Jerusalem, showing the Temple's location

5. How the Jewish dispersion aided the arrival of Christianity

The dispersion seeded Messianic thought throughout the world which proved to be powerful leaven for Christianity. Jews traveled into all parts of the world carrying with them the prophecies of the coming Christ. They eagerly shared their glad hope of the coming Messiah with all those who would listen. The Jewish dispersion, by penetrating remote areas of the world and honeycombing it with their belief in a coming Messiah, greatly improved the likelihood for belief in Jesus.

C. Greek Contributions

The Greeks were responsible for at least two major assists to the rise of Christianity:

(1) *The Greeks provided a universal language.* Alexander the Great not only had ambitions to conquer the world, he was determined to make it a Greek society. Therefore he set about *hellenizing* his conquered territories. The Greek language was to be the only recognized tongue. Lyceums (halls of instruction), were erected in many cities. Greek theatres and stadiums for the Olympic games were built in every major city. Greek architecture and art flourished. Because it was fashionable, many of the Jews (mostly of the younger generation) began to imitate the Greek customs in dress and hair style. Those who mimicked the Greek culture were called "Hellenists" by traditional-minded Jews. Deep cleavages were driven into Jewish families. Hebraists, the strict Jerusalem Jews, looked upon Greek society as a distinct threat to their religious heritage and their children's faith. Later, not long after the church was established, seeds of this rift can be detected. It was likely a source for the first recorded dispute within the new body of believers (Acts 6:1ff). Regardless of the Hebraist's antipathy for the Hellenists, due to the Greek's avid fervor to export their language, the church's missionary success was greatly enhanced. When Christianity arrived upon the scene, missionaries did not

face a language barrier at each border crossing—for Greek was spoken everywhere. The dawn of a universal language was a major boon to the initial evangelization activities of the church of Christ.

(2) *They published a universal Bible.* The early missionaries were also greatly indebted to the Greeks for a very popular version of the Old Testament Scriptures. The dispersion drove the Jewish people farther and farther away from their homeland and their mother tongue. After many years the average Jew living in remote areas from Jerusalem was quite fluent in Greek, but had forgotten his own Hebrew tongue. This made it increasingly difficult to instruct Jewish children in the Hebrew Scriptures. This ignominious problem was greatly alleviated when Ptolemy Philadelphus of Egypt began to amass a huge library which he placed under the supervision of a certain Greek named Demetrius (285-246 B.C.). This man was funded to acquire copies of all the books in the world for the purpose of storing them in this library at Alexandria.[12] The world suffered a tremendous loss when this library was later destroyed by invading Roman armies.

At Ptolemy's request, Eleazar, the current Jewish high priest, sent six elders of each Jewish tribe to make a translation of the Hebrew scriptures into Greek. There is a story centered about this event (more myth than truth it seems) which states that seventy-two delegates completed a translation in seventy-two days, thus giving it the Greek name of Septuagint, meaning *seventy.* The Roman numerals LXX (seventy) have been widely used to designate this Greek version of the Old Testament which became a popular speech Bible for the masses of Greek speaking Jews of this period. Some have suggested the Greek version was named Septuagint because there were seventy Gentile nations in the world at the time of its writing. The same could be said of this as has been said about who authored the Hebrew epistle: God only knows.

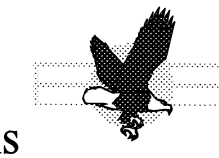
The dawn of a universal language was a major boon to the initial evangelization activities of the church of Christ.

By the time of Jesus, the LXX (Septuagint Version) had been distributed throughout the dispersion. Edersheim says the LXX "*became the people's Bible to the large Jewish world through which Christianity was afterwards to introduce itself to mankind.*"[13]

It was the street Bible, the one Jesus and the apostles read and later used in the New Testament church. From the provinces of Asia Minor to the deep recesses of Africa, and from the heart of Jerusalem to the coasts of distant Rome, Christians could herald the Good News and know they were being understood.

Unwittingly as it was to the Greeks, it would be difficult to overstate the contributions made by them toward the development and spread of Christianity.

D. Rome's Contributions



As ignorant as the senate and emperor were of the coming of Christ and the subsequent rise of Christianity, they passed and enforced laws that tremendously assisted the planting and nurturing of it. Following are some contributions by Rome that helped establish Christianity.

(1) *The power to maintain peace helped prepare for the advent of Christ.* The Greeks had gone far beyond the once small group civilization to the development of an orderly polis, a city-state system of government, but they did not achieve any peace among themselves. It remained for the Romans to bring their *Pax Romana* (Roman peace) into the world. The following quotation on this subject is from the historian, Henry Lucas :

It remained for the Romans who accomplished what the Greeks failed to do; in addition, they brought the diverse peoples of the Mediterranean under their sway, thereby creating a new condition of unity and harmony, the Pax Romana, or Roman Peace. From Scotland to the Sahara, from the Atlantic Ocean to the Tigris-Euphrates Valley, all people were subject to the civilizing influence of Rome, which indelibly stamped upon them the marks of Greco-Roman culture.
—Henry Lucas[14]

Rome successfully contained the barbaric tribes of the north and the restless tribes to the east and south. Had Christ come earlier, there would have been no such capable deterrent to maintain peace on an international scale like Rome. This provided a great measure of calmness in the world, a calmness that would assist in the mission of the Prince of Peace at his coming. Truly, our God works in wonderful and mysterious ways.

(2) *Her excellent highway system was a help toward spreading the Good News.* The Roman roads were the best the world had ever known. They needed good roads to move their peace-keeping troops as quickly as possible into the distant expanses of the empire. The outlying frontiers were always threatened by hoards of barbaric invaders. These excellent roads were busy commercial arteries helping to stimulate the world econ-omy by providing easy movement of trade caravans from one commercial center to another. The Romans were excellent engineers, surpassing the Greek constructionists. They built amazing high span bridges, one reaching a height of 50 feet arching the Targus River in Spain. This was an astonishing accomplishment for that day. Victorious generals returning from their military exploits paraded their conquered kings and spoils of war along these routes as they neared and entered the capital city. Appii Forum, one of these highways, is mentioned as a place where some of the Roman saints traveled to meet Paul on his trip to Rome (Acts 28:15). From Rome, the hub of the great wheel of the Roman Highway System, spokes extended far out into the remote provinces. This coined the proverb: "*All roads lead to Rome.*"

From the proud Roman senate sitting in its elaborate marble assembly room that voted the highway bill into existence, to the lowliest slave laboring under the lash preparing the way, none realized these great government projects would be eventually used, not merely for their future armies to march upon, but highways for Christian missionaries traveling to every nook and cranny of the empire.

From Jerusalem to the smallest hamlets in the outlying areas of the empire, then on to the proud city of Rome itself went the conquering message of the lowly Galilean on Roman super highways.

(3) *Rome's legal system assisted the missionaries.* Roman law was a tremendous advancement for the hour. Much of our modern legal system is based upon Roman law. With the problems missionaries encountered under the advanced Roman legal code, one can only imagine how they would have suffered at the hands of the Jews without this legal restraint. It is true under such despots as Nero and others who followed him in office, Christians were severely persecuted; but this was without regard for the code available in the earlier missionary days of the apostles.

(4) *Extreme moral degradation was everywhere.* This may be regarded as a negative contribution aiding the planting of Christianity. *Affluence*, especially among the upper classes, caused by the spoils of war brought with it *idleness* and a tidal wave of immorality. The apostle Paul, in chapter one of Romans, lists a catalog of sins gravely

The larger cities of the Roman empire were sloughs of popular pastime excesses. Some temples of worship were mere houses of prostitution to support their religious system. Divorce was extremely easy and commonplace. Abortion was common with no organization to discourage it as a means of birth control. Infanticide was an acceptable means of disposing of unwanted babies.

indicting the social climate of the times.

Historians record *that slaves* eventually outnumbered the citizens in Rome. Wealth and idleness along with *no recognized standard of ethics*, at least as we know it, caused society to plummet into *extreme debauchery*. The larger cities were sloughs of popular pastime excesses. Some temples of worship were mere *houses of prostitution* to support their religious system. *Divorce* was extremely easy and commonplace. *Abortion* was common with no organization to discourage it as a means of birth control. *Infanticide* was an acceptable means of disposing of unwanted babies. Infants were left exposed to the elements in fields or even drowned at birth. *Suicide* was defended as a means by which a man could extricate himself from the ills of his environment, Seneca going so far as saying, "*this was a liberty which could be taken by any who found life too unbearable.*" Others chose to escape their boredom by filling the seats of sports arenas where they took macabre pleasure in games of lethal combat.

Thousands packed themselves into the massive coliseum at Rome where spectators from the emperor to the street sweeper delighted in wanton gladiatorial games. Here, huge numbers fought in a single event to a sole surviving person. Such extreme depravity went unchallenged by the pagan religions. It took the dawn of Christianity to awaken a shameful conscious against such inhumanities.

(5) *Failure of pagan religions, a negative factor, helped plant Christianity.* Quite ignorantly pagan religion, in a negative sort of way, helped prepare the world for the coming of Christianity by creating a religious climate of spiritual readiness. The old religions had failed to meet the people's deep spiritual needs. The gods of the Greeks and Romans were no longer held in esteem. They were obsessed with the same petty jealousies and corrupted personalities as ordinary people. Their help may have been entreated for various human enterprises or for individual safety under stress, but their influence for improved character was gone. The gods were no more than deified human personalities entering into the most sensual and base intrigues of human affairs. Commenting upon this failure of paganism Henry Lucas writes:

> *But the great gods of the Greeks and Romans had lost their prestige because of the burning skepticism from the pens of such philosophers like Epicurus and Lucretius. . . . Local worship, hitherto closely associated with city-state patriotism, lost much of its significance and finally passed out of existence."15*
> —*Henry Lucas*

(6) *Rome's religion was borrowed, and therefore held no firm grip for positive influence on life styles.* Many of the Romans turned to imported religions as that of Cybele, the Great Mother, and the worship of Isis and Osiris, both major Egyptian beliefs. Persian Mythraism, especially popular among the soldiers, was an offshoot of old nature worship.

There was also the orgiastic worship of Dionysus, son of Zeus. He was the god of summer, new vegetation, abundant harvest (especially the vine), and joy. He was identified with Orpheus. Orphic brotherhoods were everywhere initiating members with purification rites, certain foods, practicing a purificatory asceticism and transmigration of the soul. They believed the soul graduated through several elevated states until it found a terminal union with the god himself.

Unlike Christianity, none of these religions could point to its founder as a historical figure. These religions were characterized by a vague set of beliefs that permitted mutual membership. It is no wonder when Christianity came upon the scene adamantly refusing to compromise its monotheistic faith and doctrine with unbelievers, that paganism, which advocated great latitudes of tolerance for all religions, became its arch enemy.

(7) *Negatively, the immoral prurient nature of the gods was a contribution.* James S. Stewart appropriately summarizes the decadent religious system with these words:

—*Regarding Paganism*—
Unlike Christianity, none of these religions could point to its founder as a historical figure. These religions were characterized by a vague set of beliefs with mutual membership commonly practiced.

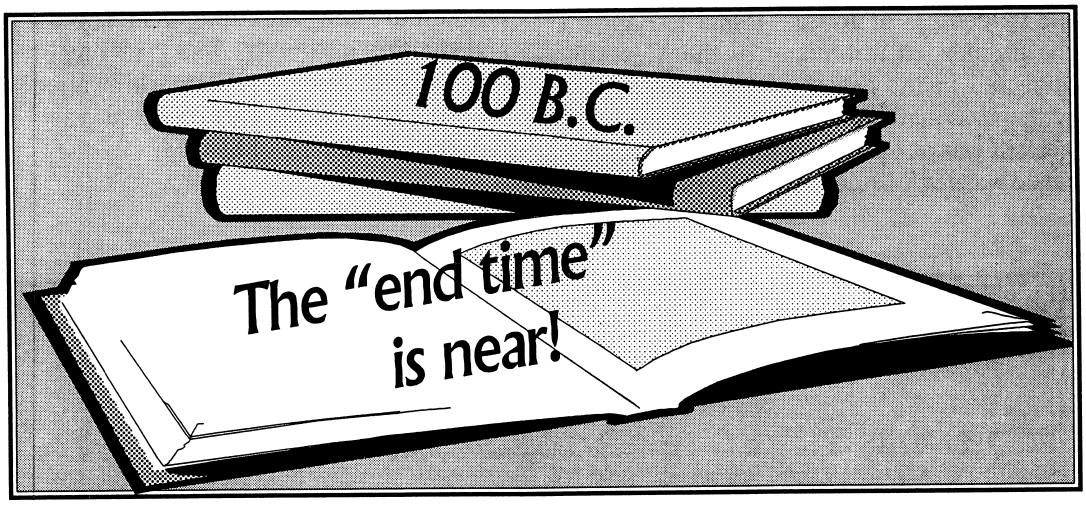
The old gods were either dead or dying. To fill the gap, two expedients were tried. On the one hand, a whole new batch of gods was imported from the east, outlandish, oriental deities brought in to stir Rome's jaded senses til among the philosophers the overcrowding of Olympus, where the gods were supposed to dwell, became a standing joke. On the other hand, the strange phenomenon of Caesar worship appeared; the emperor himself accorded divine honors. But all expedients failed. What was a whole pantheon of gods worth if they had nothing to say to a soul stabbed with the remorse of sin? When everything had been done that could be done, the hearts of men were hungry still.[16]

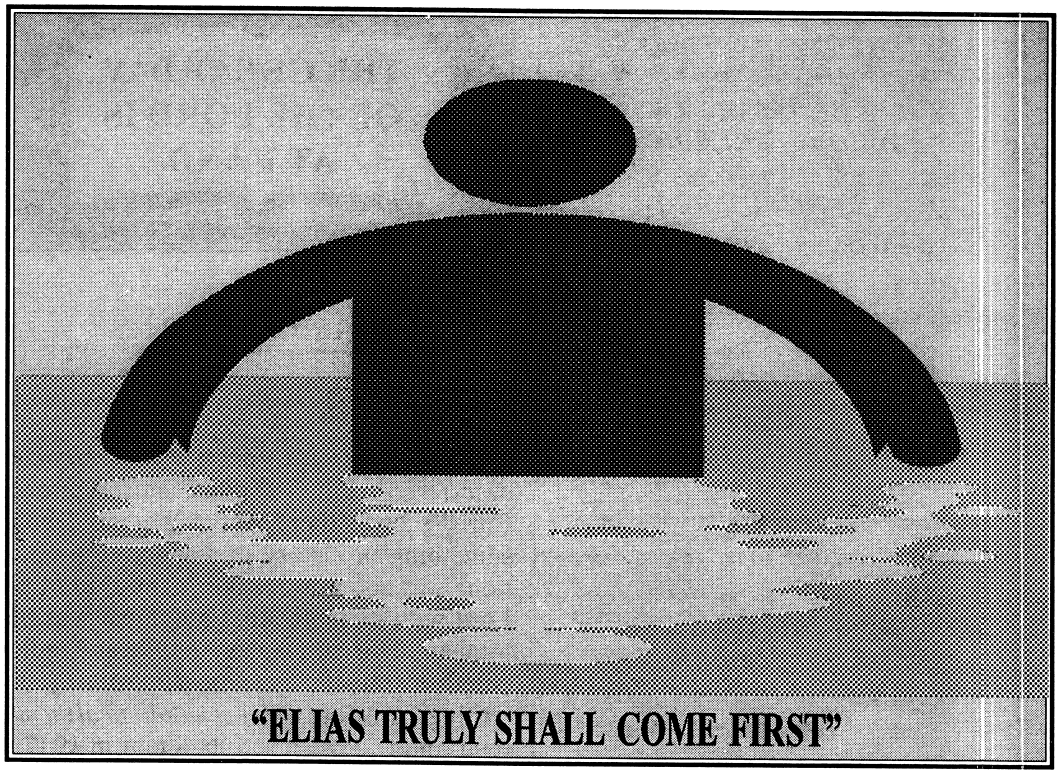
—*James S. Stewart*

THE GREAT DAY OF THE LORD IS AT HAND

Eschatological Literature

A broad expectation of cosmic hope abounded everywhere. For over two centuries prior to Christ's birth there was a general feeling something in history of staggering proportions was about to happen. The Day of the Lord with its impending judgment was imminent. This atmosphere had been kindled chiefly by *pseudepigraphical literature* (false writings) bristling with *Eschatological themes* (end time). Jewish scrolls found in 1947 at the ruins of the village of Qumran near the Dead Sea, reflect much of this thought among the Essenes. According to this literature, a Teacher of Righteousness would come. There would be a victorious war of the forces of light over the forces of the Wicked Priest. There have been many suggestions for the identity of the Teacher of Righteousness.[17] It is beyond the scope of this introductory chapter to discuss this subject here. The reader may consult the references and supplemental readings at the end of the chapter.





ISAIAH 40:3; MALACHI 4:5-6; MATTHEW 11:13-14

F. John the Baptist, God's herald, arrives

John the Baptist's mission occurred during the peak of this great period of expectancy. After 400 years of silence there was heard once again the prophetic voice, this time in the wilderness of Judea. John the Baptist, the prophesied forerunner of the Messiah, appeared in the desert of Judea preaching with passionate zeal that the kingdom of heaven was at hand. His message of repentance was for all Jews, enabling their escape from the certain forthcoming judgment of God. The "axe was laid at the root of the trees." Then suddenly Jesus, the Lamb of God—the long awaited perfect sacrifice for sin with the eternally atoning blood—came upon the scene with the message for man's deepest need. This offered all mankind the comfort of divine forgiveness giving Christianity its solid beachhead for invading the strong man's house and spoiling his goods. The great day of the Lord was at hand and the world awaited *the miracle of the ages* to be written indelibly into the annals of history.

"Bring forth therefore fruits meet for repentance" —John the Baptist

References

1. Mack Wayne Craig, "The Birth of Christ," *Great Moments With Christ,* Lubbock Christian College's Eighteenth Lectureship (Austin, Tx.: Firm Foundation Publishing House, 1976)
2. William Barclay, *The Mind of Christ* (New York, Evanston: Harper and Row, 1961), p. 206
3. James S. Stewart, *The Life Teaching of Jesus* (New York, Nashville: Abingdon Press, n. d.), p. 153
4. Victor Hugo, *Histore d'un Crime.,* 1852
5. John 14:3
6. Warner Keller, *The Bible as History* (Bantam, New York: William Morrow and Co., Inc.), p. 55
7. II Kings 24
8. II Maccabees 6:2
9. See also D. S. Russell, *The Jews From Alexander to Herod,* (Oxford: University Press, 1978) p. 47
10. Alfred Edersheim, *The Life and Times of Jesus the Messiah,* vol. I, (Grand Rapids, Mich. Wm. B. Eerdmans Pub. Co., 1962), p.29
11. Josephus, *Jewish Wars* II. 76.4
12. D. S. Russell, *Op. cit. See ref. 10 above,* p. 19
13. Alfred Edersheim, *Op. cit., p. 29.* See ref.10 above
14. Henry Lucas, *A Short History of Civilization* (New York: McGraw Hill Book Co., Inc. 1953), p. 200
15. *Ibid,* p. 233
16. James S. Stewart, *Op. cit. See ref. 3 above,* p. 20
17. D. S. Russell, *Op. cit. See ref.10 above,* p. 167

Supplementary Readings

Edersheim, Alfred, Oxon, M.A., Prophecy and History in Relation to the Messiah. London: Longmans, Green, and Co., 1885

Grant, Frederick C., *The Gospels, Their Origin and Growth. London: Faber and Faber, 1957*

Keller, Werner, *The Bible as History,* New York: William Morrow and Company, 1956

Rops, Daniel, *Jesus and His Times,* New York: E. P. Dutton and Co., 1956

Tenny, Merrill C., *New Testament Survey,* Grand Rapids, Mich.: Wm. B. Erdmans Co., 1953

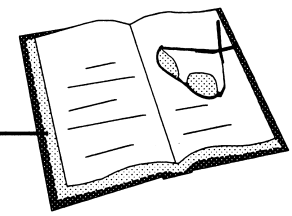
Questions for Chapter One

1. What is the theme of John Milton's poem?
2. What was the constant glowing hope of each Jewish home having little maidens?
3. What major problem do many people find in the eternal purpose of God?
4. What Old Testament character negatively affected the course of world events by being impatient with God? How did this person seem to rationalize her action?
5. What did Peter say regarding "time" with God?
6. Name several great nations that made contributions to help make Jesus' arrival the "fullness of time." What were the contributions of each (including Israel)?
7. What did the Jews carry with them into Babylonian captivity?
8. What were some significant changes in Judaism during the Babylonian captivity?
9. What were some basic differences between pagan religions and Christianity?
10. Identify:
    a. Dispersion
    b. Hasidim
    c. Pharisees and Sadducees
    d. LXX
    e. Hellenists and Hebraist
    f. The "hammerheaded"
    g. Antiochus IV
    h. Eschatological literature
    i. Appii Forum
    j. Torah
    k. Scribe
    l. Cyrus
    m. Pax Romana
    n. Ptolemy II
    o. Nebuchadnezzar

Ponder Your Answers To These Questions

1. ***Where art thou? (Gen. 3:9)***
2. ***Where is thy brother? (Gen. 4:9)***
3. ***Whose son art thou? (I Sam. 17:28)***
4. ***To whom belongest thou? (I Sam. 30:13)***
5. ***Is it well with thee? (II Kgs. 4:26)***
6. ***Is it well with thy husband? (II Kgs. 4:26)***
7. ***Is it well with the child? (II Kgs. 4:26)***
8. ***What must I do to be saved? (Acts 2:37-41)***
9. ***How shall we escape, if we neglect so great salvation? (Heb. 2:3)***

—Read This—



And this voice which came from heaven we heard, when we were with him in the holy mount. We have also a more sure word of prophecy; whereunto ye do well that ye take heed, as unto a light that shineth in a dark place, until the day dawn, and the day star arise in your hearts: Knowing this first, that no prophecy of the scripture is of any private interpretation. For the prophecy came not in old time by the will of man: but holy men of God spake as they were moved by the Holy Ghost. —2 Peter 1:18-19

Outline for Chapter Two

The Origin of the Gospel Narratives

I. No Original Documents Exist
  A. Likely problems had the original documents survived
    1. They could be heavily commercialized
    2. They would tend to lessen the importance of apostolic doctrine
  B. External Sources that Mention Jesus
    1. Falvius Josephus
    2. Carius Cornelius Tacitus
    3. Pliny the Younger
    4. Suetonius
    5. What "outside sources" provide
  C. The Gospels are not biographies

II. Why A Delay in Writing?
  A. They felt sense an extreme urgency to preach the Gospel
  B. The world was lost and dying
  C. They expected the soon return of Jesus
  D. The words of Jesus were still fresh in their minds
  E. Changes demanding a written Gospel
    1. Original testimony was becoming scarce
    2. Additional revelation had been received
    3. There was less access to apostolic authority
    4. False teachers threatened the apostolic doctrine
  F. The method of dating
  G. The synoptic accounts

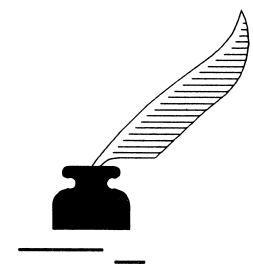
III. Some Characteristics of Each Gospel
  A. Matthew: The Gospel for Jewish readers
    1. Matthew makes strong use of Old Testament prophecy
    2. Matthew seems to be intensely aware of his Jewish readers
      (a) Matthew carefully lists Jesus' Jewish genealogy
      (b) Matthew may have written his Gospel in Aramaic
      (c) Matthew's Gospel is sensitive to traditional Judaism
    3. A discernible order can be seen in Matthew
      (a) In his genealogy list
      (b) Five major discourses can be observed
      (c) The Sermon on the Mount may be a composite of many sermons.
    4. Matthew's arrangement and development
    5. Matthew the evangelist
    6. The date of Matthew's Gospel
  B. Mark: The Gospel for Roman readers
    1. Mark 16:9-20
  C. Luke: The global Gospel
  D. John: The final Gospel
    1. The flow of the Gospel
    2. The hour of glory

RITING THE GOSPEL

Chapter Two

Origin of the Gospel Narratives

It shall stand in its beauty
and its glory,
While the earth and the heavens
pass away;
Ever telling the blessed
wondrous story,
Of the loving Lamb,
the only living way.
—H. B. Hartzler



1. NO ORIGINAL DOCUMENTS EXIST

One may wonder why Jesus chose not to leave a single word in his personal writing. None of the original sacred documents have survived the centuries. God, in his infinite wisdom, must have intended for it to have been this way. There are several likely reasons why he may not have chosen to preserve any original autographs.

A. Likely problems had the original documents survived

God must have had a purpose for not keeping the autographs around. While he has not revealed his mind on the matter, there are at least two evils which could have likely developed had the original documents survived:

1. They could be heavily commercialized.

Religious officials have been known to be susceptible to the idolatry of covetousness. Although it would contradict sharply their own message, authentic autographs of the Gospel could be coveted merchandise for crass religious commercialists. Four centuries before Christ, Malachi rebuked the priests for profaning the worship by offering polluted sacrifices to God while keeping the best for themselves. By the time Jesus arrived on the scene, the priests had converted the Temple into a "*den of merchandise*" (Jno. 2:16). One of Jesus' own disciples betrayed him for thirty pieces of silver. Peter warns elders about feeding the flock for "filthy lucre" (I Pet. 5:2).

Although predominately filled with love, even the church was plagued by covetousness in some early members. This sin persists. The love of money perpetually influences covetous people (I Tim. 6:10). Just for a moment, suppose the Ark of the Covenant was still with us. Movie makers have already capitalized on its fictitious discovery. One can only imagine how much it would be merchandised if the real ark were discovered and fell into covetous hands, not to even mention the ten commandments. Also consider what a personal manuscript from Jesus or the apostles would be worth. This just might be one reason our Lord did not see fit to keep them around.

2. They would tend to lessen the importance of apostolic doctrine.

All inspired literature is to be regarded as equal in authority for doctrine in the New Testament church. The mission of the Holy Spirit was to guide the apostles into all truth (Jno. 16:17). Their teaching was regarded as the inspired word of God, equal to Christ's own instructions.

Paul said of his writing: "*For I neither received it of man, neither was I taught it, but by the revelation of Jesus Christ*" *(Gal. 1:10).* Even though the apostles confirmed their teaching by powerful demonstrations of supernatural works the same as Jesus did, some place more emphasis on Jesus' instruction than on their inspired books. This persists in spite of Jesus having told the apostles: "*Whatsoever ye bind on earth will be bound in heaven; and whatsoever ye loose on earth will be loosed in heaven*" (Matt. 16:19). Innocent as they are, red letter editions of the New Testament that high-light Jesus' words subtly emphasize Jesus' teaching over other inspired men.

"*Did Jesus say that, or one of the apostles,*" is a question frequently asked. Had manuscripts of Jesus survived, they might very well be abused to devalue doctrine the Holy Spirit revealed to the apostles. Their teaching was to be received as equal value to that of Jesus (Acts 2:42). *The faith that was "once delivered unto the saints," included all of the inspired writings of the New Testament.*

There were many documents written about the life and teaching of Jesus other than those we have in the canonical New Testament (Lu. 1:1-3). As beneficial as these may be historically, they do not belong to the canon. The twenty-seven books in the New Testament have been preserved for us by God. Luke prefaces his Gospel by stating there were several narratives circulating concerning Jesus which motivated him to make an accurate record. Regarding this, he says:

> *For as much as many have taken in hand to set forth in orderly declaration of those things which are most surely believed among us, even as they delivered them unto us, which from the beginning were eyewitnesses and ministers to his word; it seemed good to me also, having had perfect understanding of all things from the very first, to write unto thee in order.* —Lu. 1:1-3

The existing sources of information we have preserved in the canon perfectly serve the Holy Spirit's redemptive purpose. Peter declares this truth candidly:

> *Grace and peace be multiplied unto you through the knowledge of God, and of Jesus our Lord. According to his divine power hath he given us all things that pertain unto life and godliness, through the knowledge of him that hath called us to glory and virtue. Whereby are given unto us exceeding great and precious promises: that by these ye might be partakers of the divine nature, having escaped the corruption that is in the world through lust.* —II Pet. 1:2-4.

B. External Sources that Mention Jesus

1. Flavius Josephus.

Josephus, a renown Jewish historian of the first century, spoke of Jesus this way:

> *At that time lived Jesus, a wise man, if indeed he may be called a man; for he performed many wonderful works. He was a teacher of such as received the truth with pleasure. He drew over to him many Jews and Gentiles. This was the Christ. And when Pilate, at the instigation of the chief men among us, had condemned him to the cross, they who conceived an affection for him did not cease to adhere to him. For on the third day he appeared to them alive again, the divine prophets having foretold this and many wonderful things concerning him. And the sect of the Christians, so called from him, subsists at this time.*[1] *—Flavius Josephus*

This may sound a bit strange coming from a Jewish historian, and it may very well be some redactor's comment. Yet, even though the quote may be questioned, the fact remains that it appears in every extant copy of Josephus and was quoted by Eusebius in A. D. 315. There is also a reference to Jesus by Josephus in an early North Slavic manuscript that reads:

> *At that time a man appeared, if he be called a man. His nature and his body were human, but his appearance was more than human. He performed miracles through some invisible power. Some said of him that he was our first Law giver, Moses risen from the dead, and making himself known by many healings and magic works; others thought he was God. I, personally in view of his whole life, should not call him a messenger of God.*[2]
>
> *—Flavius Josephus*

Elsewhere this historian says:

> *But this younger Ananus who took the high priesthood, was a bold man in his temper, and very insolent, when therefore he thought he now had a proper opportunity to exercise his authority . . . he assembled the Sanhedrin, . . . brought before them the brother of Jesus, who is called the Christ, whose name was James, and some others, and when he had an accusation against them . . . he delivered them to be stoned.*[3]
>
> *—Flavius Josephus*

2. Carius Cornelius Tacitus.

Tacitus was a first century Roman historian and bitter opponent of Christianity. In an account of the charge against Nero's burning of Rome he mentions Jesus in these words:

But neither all human help nor liberality of the emperor, nor all the atonements presented to the gods, availed to abate the infamy he lay under of having ordered the city to be set on fire. To suppress, therefore, this common rumor, Nero procured others to be accused, and inflicted exquisite punishment upon those people, who were in abhorrence for their crimes, and were commonly known by the name of Christians. They had their denomination from Christus, who in the reign of Tiberius was put to death as a common criminal by the procurator Pontus Pilate. This pernicious superstition, though checked awhile, broke out again and spread not only over Judea, the source of this evil, but reached the city also; whither flow from all quarters all things vile and shameful, and where they find shelter and encouragement. At first they were only apprehended who confessed themselves of that sect; afterwards a vast multitude discovered by them, all of which were condemned, not so much for the crime of burning the city, as for their enmity to mankind. Their executions were so contrived as to expose them to derision and contempt. Some were covered with the skins of wild beasts, and torn to pieces by dogs; some were crucified; others having been plastered over with combustible materials, were set up as lights in the night time, and thus burned to death. Nero made use of his own gardens as a theatre upon this occasion, and also exhibited the diversions of the circus, sometimes standing in the crowd as a spectator, in the habit of a charioteer, at other times driving a chariot himself; til at length these men, though really criminal, and deserving exemplary punishment, began to be commiserated, as people who were destroyed, not out of regard to public welfare, but only to gratify the cruelty of one man.[4]

3. Pliny The Younger (112 A. D.).

Pliny was propraetor of the province of Bithynia. He wrote emperor Trajan about 112 A. D. describing conditions in his area. It seems Christianity was having so much impact upon the Bithynians that their pagan sacrifices were being neglected and their temples completely deserted.

Consequently there had been a sharp decline in the demand for sacrificial animals for pagan feasts. Pliny, inexperienced with trial procedures for Christians, wrote Rome for instructions on how to proceed with the problem. Excerpts from his letter contain reliable information on the historicity of Jesus of Nazareth. Concerning the manner in which he was examining the Christian offenders, Pliny wrote:

It is my rule, Sire, to refer to you matters where I am uncertain. For who can better direct my hesitation or instruct my ignorance? I was never present at any trial of Christians; therefore, I do not know what are the penalties or investigations, and what limits are observed. . . Meanwhile, this is the course that I have adopted in the case of those brought before me as Christians: if they admit it I repeat the question a second and third time, threatening capital punishment; if they persist I sentence them to death. For I do not doubt that, whatever crime it may be to which they have confessed, their pertinacity and inflexible obstinacy should be punished. . . a greater variety of cases were brought to me. An anonymous pamphlet was issued, containing many names. All who denied that they were or had been Christians I considered should be discharged, because they called upon the gods at my dictation and did reverence, with incense and wine, to your image which I ordered to be brought forward for this purpose, together with the statutes of the deities; and especially because they cursed Christ, a thing which, it is said, genuine Christians cannot be induced to do. . . The matter seemed to me to justify my consulting you, especially on account of the number of those imperilled.[5]

The emperor wrote the inquiring propraetor that he had *"taken the right line."*

4. Suetonius (ca. 88).

Suetonius was a friend of Pliny the Younger. In the Life of Claudius contained in *The Twelve Caesars*, he wrote:

"Because the Jews at Rome caused continuous disturbances at the instigation of Chrestus, he expelled them from the city".[6]

This seems to be speaking of the same event recorded by Luke in Acts 18:2 where he speaks of Claudius as having ordered all Jews to leave Rome.

5. What "outside sources" provide.

Several points may be made concerning these few brief historical references to Jesus.

(a) *They help prove the historicity of Jesus.* The Gospel records are sufficient to make Jesus a bona fide person in history. Outside sources support them in making him historical. The historicity of Jesus makes everything the Bible has to say about this Man worthy of the world's most serious consideration. The message concerning Jesus disturbed the world's conscience as no other message had ever done before or since. For it, men have freely suffered severe persecutions as they sang hymns of praise and hope on their way to martyrdom. Such dedication was not due to mere sentimentalism rooted in fiction. Their belief rested upon solid historical facts for which they were willing to die.

(b) *These brief references support the Scriptures.* These few references confirm prophecies in which Jesus pictures the kingdom as beginning in an insignificant and small manner but later expanding into all the world. The parables of the mustard seed and the leaven equally serve to demonstrate this point.[7]

(c) *While supportive, we should understand that "outside proof" of Jesus' existence is not essential for valid faith.* The Bible is sufficient for this purpose. Untold millions have lived without their names having been recorded in the annals of history. The powerful influence of the Holy Spirit through the means of the written Gospel is of itself sufficient testimony, not only that Jesus lived, but that he ever lives.

C. The Gospels are not biographies

These four records of the Gospel are not intended as biographies, *they are testimony calculated to produce faith that Jesus is the Christ of God.* They do cover over thirty years of Jesus' birth, life, death, and doctrine in such a highly selective and condensed manner that any one of them can be read in a single reading session.

The word "Gospel" is from the Greek word *euaggellion,* meaning "good news," or "glad tidings." Justin Martyr (200 A. D.) was the first to use the word "Gospels" as we commonly use it today.

While each has its own unique material, the events in the life of each one of the Synoptics (meaning "see alike") has similar copy, much even identical, while John is noticeably different. John tells his readers his volume has been edited for the purpose of giving only the essential evidence necessary to produce saving faith (20:30-31).

The others are highly selective in their material also. (See an introduction to Luke's Gospel.[8]) What we do have preserved are precise documents composed of carefully selected material sufficiently serving the divine purpose for kindling faith in one's heart. The purpose of these documents is not to give a detailed or chronological biography of Christ's life.

What we do have are four inspired men giving us a variety of views of Jesus within the sphere of their personal vocabularies and styles of personality. From these various vantage points, these men present highly personalized stenographic views of the character and deeds of Jesus. Together, the books form a beautiful scenic panorama of Jesus in his role as the Son of Man to convince readers he is the Christ of God.

These four views of our Lord keep the story of man's redemption interestingly alive to the serious Bible student. This method of revelation accounts for the individual differences, arrangement of material and personal touches of the writers so evident in each narrative.

11. THE DELAY IN WRITING

Although most scholars assign the Gospel records to the last half of the first century, no one can be certain concerning their exact dates. However, there are very good reasons for assigning them to the last half of the first century.[9] This means an entire generation had passed before the evangelists began to write. Most modern books about great personalities are penned within a few years of their deaths, yet these authors waited for over thirty years. Why did they wait so long before picking up their pens to write about the greatest figure the world had ever known?

We cannot entertain for a moment the thought they were merely dilatory in undertaking this task. There were four factors that may have caused their delay in writing.

A. They felt an extreme urgency to preach the Gospel

The evangelists felt an extreme urgency to immediately preach salvation in Jesus' name. The Holy Spirit had been received on Pentecost when three thousand souls were saved from eternal destruction (Acts 2ff.). A few days later, the number had swelled to over ten thousand.

B. The world was lost and dying

The harvest was white with those waiting to hear the vital message of their redemption. Jesus had already pointed to this (Jno. 4).

All this filled every believer's heart with an urgency and joy never known before, so, this small band of happy souls did not immediately elect to take time to write the Good News. The highest priority was to herald quickly the unique key to eternal life.

C. They expected the soon return of Jesus

Had not Jesus said himself, "This generation shall not pass until all these things be fulfilled"? They felt this event would occur within their life span, so time was precious. To redeem the time, they hurried out to a lost world shouting in city after city the joyful tidings: "*Christ lives! He is risen! Hallelujah, Christ lives!*"

D. The words of Jesus were still fresh in their minds

With the passing of time and the death of the apostles, who were the primary sources for the new Christian doctrine (Acts 2:42), the need became more pressing for the messages to be written, but for the early moment the vivid message of the Master was flashing in their minds.

One cannot imagine the fervor of excitement generated among the disciples during the forty days after his resurrection when Jesus appeared to them numerous times. During this period Jesus gave them repeated last minute instructions concerning the immediate coming of the Holy Spirit. These things would announce the arrival of the kingdom of God (Acts 1:1-9).

Also, with the fervent zeal they received on the first Pentecost after his resurrection,

along with the baptism of the Holy Spirit, one can readily understand why these men were accused of neglecting the needy widows in the early church (Acts 6). Even this worthy work was considered secondary to preaching the Gospel. To solve the problem, the apostles instructed the church to assign a special task force for this benevolent work while they continued to give their full time to the labor to which they had been called—the preaching of the Gospel to every creature.

E. Changes that called for a written Gospel

By the arrival of the sixth decade a great many changes had taken place. What were some of them?

1. Original testimony was becoming scarce.

Nearly a generation had passed which meant eyewitnesses of Jesus and his resurrection were much more difficult to have on hand.

2. Additional revelation had been received.

By the time of their writing in the sixth decade, the late arriving apostle Paul had appeared on the scene with additional revelation enlightening the churches on the subject of the Second Advent. He informed them Jesus' return would be much later than they formerly expected. (I Thess. 2; Acts 20:29-31)

3. There was less access to apostolic authority.

Hot persecution in Jerusalem broke out causing the disciples to disperse and be driven farther and farther from Jerusalem, their source of apostolic authority (Acts 8:1ff.). New problems were arising in the small distant churches of Asia Minor and other outlying posts in the world. There was a pressing need to have a prompt answer to plaguing doctrinal questions that persisted in the fledgling congregations because Judaizing teachers were everywhere, harshly condemning those who were foregoing circumcision in newly established churches. Remote churches had some members who had received certain gifts of the Holy Spirit. These would eventually give way to the authority of the *written* word then in process of being penned by the inspired writers. Just here, let us note I Corinthians 13:8-13:

> *Charity never faileth: but whether there be prophecies, they shall fail; and whether there be tongues, they shall cease; whether there be knowledge, it shall vanish away. For we know in part, and we prophecy in part. But when that which is perfect is come, then that which is in part shall be done away. When I was a child, I spake as a child, I understood as a child, I thought as a child: but when I became a man, I put away childish things. For now we see through a glass darkly; but then face to face: now I know in part; but then shall I know even as also I am known. And now abideth faith, hope, charity, these three; but the greatest of these is charity.*

Observe in the above text that the epistles constitute what Paul called "parts." Together, these parts would eventually compose the perfect revealed will (the New Testament) of the Holy Spirit given through inspired writers to the churches and individuals. According to the apostle Paul, when all parts had been received, direct inspiration would cease. In the above text, he compares the supernatural gift of speaking in tongues to mere baby talk—quite natural for the infant church but which would eventually give way to a more mature language. That mature instruction is what we now have as the New

Testament in its completed form. It must not be altered in any way (Gal.1:8-9).

4. False teachers threatened the apostolic doctrine (Acts 20:29-30).

Interference by false teachers demanded a constant presence of authority for the local church; but the apostles could not be everywhere to oppose the Judaizing teachers who were infiltrating the church. They threatened to engulf entire provinces (as Galatia) with their heresy. Gnosticism, just beginning, was making itself felt as an elite knowledge essential for salvation. It condemned the flesh as being totally evil. Dedicated to this erroneous doctrine, they held that Jesus was totally Spirit, never occupying a sinful fleshly body. A heresy concerning the resurrection was also invading the church (I Tim. 5:8).

Paul viewed these along with other ominous attitudes within the church, as indications that a general falling away would occur within the church, the nucleus having already formed (II Thess. 2:10).

By the latter part of the first century, the tradition of the oral Gospel had become extremely outdated. The authoritative "apostles' doctrine" needed to be readily available in remote areas in order to meet the urgency of having the truth available when false teaching presented itself. Having an apostle present to settle doctrinal problems in a rapidly expanding church in an ever increasingly hostile environment was becoming impossible. To meet the needs of the expanding church, the Holy Spirit influenced "holy men of God" to pen the sacred story of Jesus' life and teaching, as well as the other books of the New Testament.

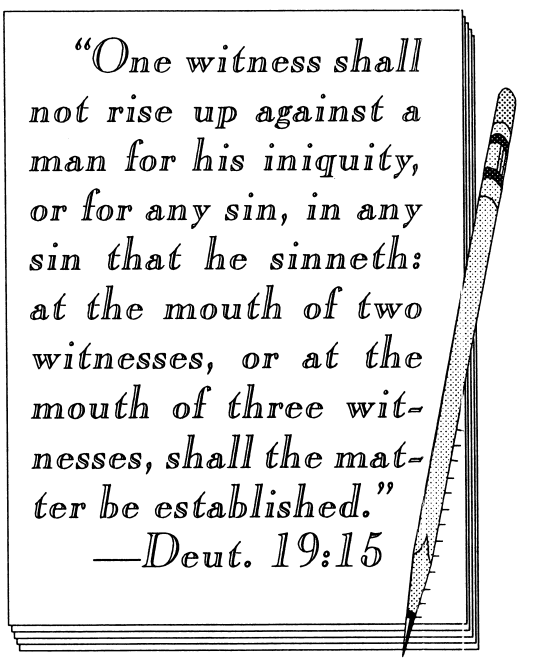
F. The method of dating

Just how do scholars arrive at dating the Gospels? It is generally agreed the crucifixion took place about A. D. 30. It can be determined from Luke 3:1 that John the Baptist's ministry took place in the "*fifteenth year of the reign of Tiberius Caesar.*" Tiberius began his rule in A. D. 12 which would make John's ministry fall in the year of A.D. 27.[10] The fourth Gospel mentions three Passovers from John's ministry to the close of Jesus' ministry. This would make the third Passover (the one of the crucifixion) fall in A. D. 30.[11]

Other sources verify Pilate (26-36 A. D.) as the Roman Governor of Judea, Herod Antipas the tetrarch of Galilee, and Caiphas the high priest of the Jews, at this time. It is generally conceded by conservative scholars that John of Zebedee wrote his Gospel sometime during the last decade of the first century. The Synoptics were penned earlier in the sixth decade. A few writers, such as the German scholar Harnack, would give the Gospel of Mark a slightly earlier date.[12]

G. The three Synoptics

THERE IS ONLY ONE GOSPEL. The holy writers have given us four accounts of it which increased its impact upon varied ethnic groups. As we shall presently see, each of the Gospel writers seems to have a special segment of society in mind. Having four narratives also supports this Old Testament declaration:



The first three accounts of the Gospel, Matthew, Mark, and Luke, are commonly called the "Synoptic Gospels." It is from the Greek word *sunoptikos,* meaning "see alike." Its use in reference to the Bible Narratives means "taking a common view." This is because they present similar views of the life of Christ much more identical than that of John who wrote many years later.

The close relationship between the Synoptics may be observed when noting Matthew, Mark and Luke respectively have 58, 93, and 41 mutual references, while John has only 8; and while these first three writers have 42, 7, and 59 references peculiar to themselves, John has 92.

John differs from the Synoptics in the three major areas of geography, chronology and style. Geographically, this Gospel concentrates mainly upon the Lord's work in Judea, especially in Jerusalem, although it does refer to an early Galilean ministry the others omit. The Synoptics speak much of Jesus' Galilean ministry. In chronology, John reveals several events in the earlier Judean ministry of Jesus which coincides with John the Baptist's preaching. Regarding style, it is readily discernible in the fourth Gospel that John's long experience and years of meditation have given this Book a spiritual profundity characteristic of an aged saint who "had been with Jesus" for many seasons, and under the fire of many trials.

III. SOME CHARACTERISTICS OF EACH GOSPEL

A. Matthew: The Gospel for Jewish readers

The Gospel narratives have been placed at the beginning of the New Testament because they deal with the very beginning of Christianity. Matthew was given the first place. Early church fathers who assembled the canon into book form generally believed Matthew wrote his account first.

Nowhere does Matthew claim authorship for the book that bears his name, but it is agreed by early church writers that he wrote this wonderful work on the life and ministry of Jesus. In A. D. 130, Papias named Matthew as the writer. He is called more prominently "Levi, the son of Alphaeus" by Mark and Luke. It is disputed that he is the same Alphaeus who was the father of James the Less. Matthew is intensely a "Jewish" Gospel, therefore its first place in the New Testament serves well as a good link with the Old Jewish system. Note now the strong evidence that Matthew wrote with a *Jewish audience in mind:*

1. Matthew makes strong use of Old Testament prophecy.

He shows that all prophecies concerning the Messiah were fulfilled in Jesus of Nazareth, making him the anointed Messiah of promise—the King to be seated on David's throne. Westcott and Hort list 136 Old Testament references in this book. The other Gospel accounts also make use of Old Testament prophecy, but not so much as Matthew. Because of its heavy use of prophecy as well as its first place in the New Testament, Matthew serves as a "bridge" connecting the Old Testament with the New, demonstrating that the former covenant has been superseded by the new covenant in Christ (Matt. 26:28).

2. Matthew seems to be intensely aware of his Jewish readers.

He makes an effort to convert Jews to Christ as well as bolster the sagging faith

of those already converted. His Gospel answers in detail much of the propaganda the Jews had spread against Jesus, especially concerning his birth and the resurrection. Also, none of the other Gospels record the Jews' attempt to explain the empty grave as Matthew does (ch. 27:62ff.).

(a) *Matthew carefully lists Jesus' Jewish genealogy.* In the very beginning of his Book, Matthew makes sure the Jews are aware of Jesus' Jewish credentials by giving his genealogical pedigree through David all the way back to Abraham, the adored father of the Jewish family.

If Jesus' Messianic claims were going to have the slightest impact upon the Jews, his credentials to the Jewish family tree and to David's throne would have to be thoroughly established. Matthew repeatedly and powerfully demonstrates by many Old Testament references that the birth of Jesus, the massacre of the Bethlehem babes, the flight into Egypt to escape the wrath of Herod, and his upbringing at Nazareth were all according to prophecy. Matthew holds the Jewish law repeatedly before his readers anticipating their knowledge of it and proving by their own system that Jesus was truly the Messiah of Moses' prophecy. Sin is a violation of the goodness of man's original mind and spirit, not just a mere violation of the written law. It is upon the altar of conscience deep within one's heart that our spiritual gifts are to be offered to God. This offering is defiled by losing control of lawful desires, turning them into lusts. If the altar of the soul is polluted, external worship is vain. God will not accept formal sacrifices offered from an impure heart. This was an acute problem at the Temple and abides yet in the church. During the 6th century B.C. Jeremiah warned against such hypocrisy (Jer. 7:14).

(b) *Matthew may have written his Gospel in Aramaic.* Papias (ca. 60-135) recorded: "Matthew compiled the 'Sayings' in the Hebrew language, and everyone translated them as well as he could."[13] According to Papias' statement, Matthew seems to have made constant notations of Jesus' teaching in Aramaic (a form of Hebrew) as he listened to his great sermons. He may have translated them into Greek at some later time. This would be the Gospel which we have that bears his name. Bearing in mind that Matthew was a tax collector accustomed to keeping meticulous records gives Papias' comment some reliability.

(c) Matthew's Gospel is sensitive to traditional Judaism. Some have seen in Matthew a strong air of resurgence against the current trends of Judaism of the first century. Everett F. Harrison remarks of this:

> *The Gospel is sensitive also to the phenomena of current Judaism: its emphasis upon external acts of piety, the love of recognition in its leaders, the proselyting activity of the Jews, the practice of binding and loosing in relation to authority, and even a hint to the dispute between the two schools of thought on divorce (19:3). These are but a few samples of the local color that shine through.*[14]

3. A discernible order can be seen in Matthew.

There is considerable evidence that Matthew made a strong effort to arrange his Gospel in good order. The scarcity of personal manuscripts in those days made it necessary for many to memorize their entire contents. Excellent arrangement made written material easier to memorize. Also, the clarity produced from careful arrangement of the document would increase its power of persuasion over its readers.[15]

(a) *In his genealogy list.* He conveniently divides them into three lists of fourteen names each. William Barclay illustrates that the consonants in David's name add up to fourteen in their letter numerical equivalents.

(b) *Five major discourses can be observed.* The entire Book is woven around five major discourses, each concluding with this phrase: "*And it came to pass, when Jesus had finished all these sayings. . .*" (Matt. 7:28; 11:1; 13:53; 19:1; 26:1).

(c) *The Sermon on the Mount may be a composite of many sermons.* In chapters 5 through 7 there is a lengthy amount of material presented as one sermon. This exhortation is not so well grouped in the other Gospel narratives but is found at different times and in various contexts. Luke presents some of it together, but not nearly so much as Matthew, nor in the manner in which Matthew relates it. Jesus may have preached all this material in one discourse, but it could not be determined by the other Gospel writers. It may be that Matthew's desire to strengthen Jewish Christian's convictions that Jesus' authority was greater than Moses' caused him to edit the material in the manner in which he did. This is very noticeable in this beautiful literature by the repeated use of this statement: "You have heard it said . . . but I say unto you." *This statement is repeated seven times in the fifth chapter.*

Sin's occurrence in the heart before its outward appearance is held in vivid contrast to the Old Testament Law.

4. Matthew's arrangement and development.

According to Matthew, the age of the Spirit had arrived. The Saviour and King, long looked for by the Jews, is absolutely Jesus of Nazareth. Due to his divine conception by the Holy Spirit, He is the Son of God. The Gentiles recognized this from afar by a guiding light from God and immediately came to worship him (Isa. 62:2). However, Herod, a usurper of the Jewish throne, anticipating a Jewish threat, quickly sought to destroy him. Thus, the battle of the flesh and Spirit was on from the beginning of Jesus' arrival. Nevertheless Jesus was protected by the direction of the Holy Spirit until his mission was completed.

The age of the Spirit was to be heralded by Elijah the prophet to come (Mal. 4). He appears in spirit and power in the person of John the Baptist who announces that the kingdom is imminent. John baptizes Jesus, declaring him to be the Messiah who will initiate the coming kingdom by a baptism of the Spirit. Inheritance of the kingdom will be theirs who receive his doctrine and baptism, while those rejecting him will be overcome in a baptism of fire (See Lu. 7:29-31).

Following his baptism, Jesus' ministry begins by his triumph over Satan in a special series of temptations in the wilderness. While he does this by his knowledge of the law, it is made evident by the great sermon that follows the ordeal, that his word is superior to the law and must be heard if one is to enter the kingdom.

The Jewish hierarchy rejected Jesus' miraculous demonstration of power and compassion, explaining that the display was by the power and influence of Beelzebub, the chief of Devils. Because of their hardness of heart, Jesus began teaching in parables. This enabled those who had spiritual hearts to understand the Spiritual content of his teaching, while shutting out the meaning to those who did not. This gave extended time to teach in the presence of those who wished to destroy him. Jesus announced his upcoming death to his disciples by saying he would fulfill his mission to establish the new order (his church of faith people) regardless of his death. The sign of Jonah would be given—that in three days he would rise from the dead and the gospel would be preached to the Gentiles.

At the beginning of the last week of his life Jesus enters Jerusalem. He finds not only the Temple corrupted, but the Jewish system wholly barren of the fruits of the Spirit. One day later, he symbolically pronounces a curse upon them by cursing a barren fig tree. At the close of a week's debate with the religious representatives in Jerusalem Jesus desires to keep the final Passover of his life with his disciples. At this feast, after Judas is dismissed to betray him, he teaches his disciples a needed lesson in humility as an essential characteristic of the kingdom.

At this supper, he further seals the New

Covenant with the upcoming sacrifice of his body and blood with bread and fruit of the vine, telling the disciples that each should eat the bread and drink the cup. He would drink it anew with them, he said, when the kingdom arrived.

Jesus surrenders himself after a night of agony in the Garden of Gethsemane and is put to death by the reluctant Pilate, governor of Judea, who feared the Jews would complain to Caesar about his work. On the third day following (the first day of the week), Jesus is resurrected and appears to his disciples. He tells them all things are now ready and they should preach the Gospel to every nation. He commissions them for the task and promises to be with them always.

5. Matthew The Evangelist.

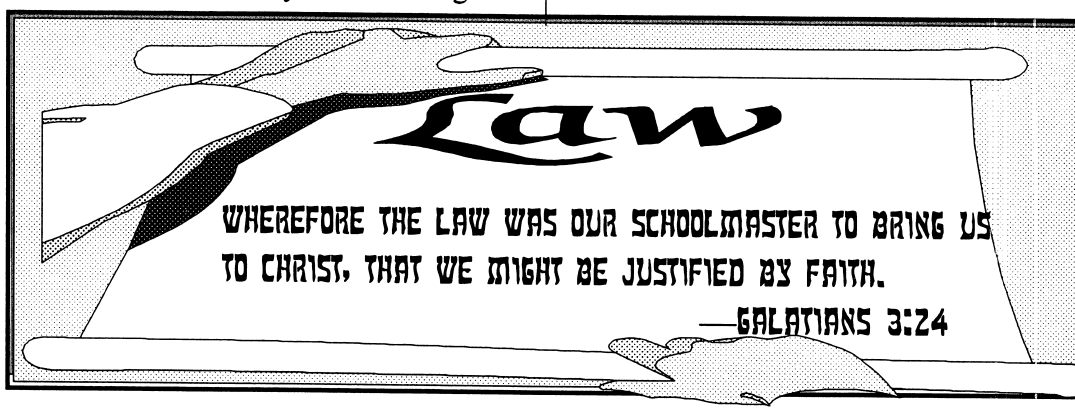
Mark identifies Matthew as Levi the Son of Alphaeus (Mk. 2:14). "Levi" means *the gift of God.* With the exception of the four lists of the apostles, and in chapter 9 where he modestly mentions in a very few words his calling, Matthew is not mentioned in the New Testament. We have no record of his apostolic activities. With the modesty which characterizes all the Gospel writers, Matthew passes over his conversion in only one verse. He does not attempt to protect himself from his past; quite the contrary, he makes open claim to have held the office of the hated publican. It is significant that Jesus had his strongest conversions from such outcast sinners as Matthew. When a sinner's heart is touched by the love and grace of God, causing him to view his sins as deplorable in the presence of Jesus, he is motivated far beyond those church members who are completely satisfied with an inherited, comfortable, personally unproved secondhand religion.

Matthew's evangelistic fervor is observable early in his calling. He not only gave up immediately the lucrative position of tax collector in order to follow Jesus, he also gave a feast for his publican friends at which Jesus was present (Lu. 5:29).

Matthew must have been overwhelmed with the joy at his call to serve Jesus. He felt the strong purpose of his calling and chose to share immediately with others his happiness. He wanted very much for his friends to experience this happiness too.

While Peter, James and John were hard working rustic fishermen from Galilee that may have been considered "ignorant and unlearned men," (Acts 4:13) it is difficult to see how this could apply to Matthew. A considerable degree of education was needed to be a tax collector. His position demanded accurate record keeping and a good proficiency in mathematics. Also, Papias' quote (already mentioned) that spoke of Matthew as having first written his Gospel in Aramaic, and perhaps later in Greek, argues strongly for a formal education.

With this in mind, one must appreciate the educational background of this man. It is evident that Matthew, somewhat like Saul of Tarsus, had a fair degree of education prior to his call.



6. The date of Matthew's Gospel.

Like the other Gospel accounts, the exact date for Matthew's Gospel is uncertain. Although scholars disagree, a range can be set. It was probably written between the first dispersion of the Jewish Christians (ca.35 A. D.) and the destruction of Jerusalem (70 A.D.). Before the dispersion, there would have been little need for a written Gospel in Palestine because the apostles were still quite accessible. Regarding a date after 70 A. D., it should be noted there is no mention of Jerusalem's having been destroyed. It does seem that something of this magnitude in Jewish history, having such tremendous social impact upon the Jews, would have hardly gone overlooked by an apostle whose principle objective was a Jewish audience.

Although a date as early as 50 A. D. has been suggested, a more likely period for Matthew's writing would be about 58-68 A. D. not long before Jerusalem was destroyed by the Romans. Matthew's Gospel is characterized by the kingship and royalty of Jesus, a strong emphasis on the upcoming destruction of Jerusalem, the judgment of God, and the relationship of the Fatherhood of God and Jesus. Matthew is the only writer of the Gospels to mention the word "church" (Matt. 16:18; 18:17). This Gospel is said to be the most widely read Book in all the world.

B. Mark: The Gospel for Roman readers

Certain things in the Book of Mark indicate he wrote principally with a Roman audience in mind. Latin was spoken everywhere in the empire and Mark contains a significant amount of Latin expressions—more than any of the other Gospels. He even pauses to define some of these to his readers (Mk. 12:42).

There is an interesting incident that lends credence to Mark having a Latin audience principally in mind. When he penned Jesus' sorrowful trip to Calvary through the Jerusalem streets, he spoke of a certain Simon, a Cyrenian whom the soldiers compelled to assist Jesus in carrying his cross, as the father of Alexander and Rufus. Paul, in Romans 16:13, says that Rufus and his mother dwelt in Rome. Some think that Mark added this to his Gospel because he knew this bit of information would be of interest to his Roman readers.

Some of the early Christian writers as Irenaeus (ca. 130-185) and Clement of Alexandria (ca. 150-220), say Mark was a companion to Peter in Rome. Justin Martyr (ca. 100-165) went so far as to refer to the book as *The Memoirs of Peter.* Although there is no *primary* evidence Peter ever visited the capital city, some conservative scholars as Everett Harrison speak of Mark's close association with Peter whom they believe to have ministered there. Harrison bases his position on this summary which he lifts from Irenaeus and Clement:

> *If Peter's connection with Mark's Gospel is what the ancients represent it to have been, then we have in this work, in the ultimate sense, the testimony of an apostle and eyewitness. This is made probable by the Gospel itself, for again and again the narrative has a fullness, a freshness, and a liveliness that set it apart from the other Synoptics.*[16] —Everett. Harrison

James S. Stewart in his colorful style also remarks on this as follows:

> *We see Mark listening again and again to the story of the life and death of Jesus as it came from Peter's lips, until he knew that story by heart himself and was living in the atmosphere of it: and when at last death claimed his great friend and leader, and Mark was left alone, he wrote the story down. And so the earliest Gospel was given to the world. It is a great thing to know that behind it stands the witness of Peter, one of the Master's most intimate friends. Hence its historical setting is beyond dispute.*[17] —James S. Stewart

It is generally agreed that the traditional writer of this Gospel was John Mark, the same Mark as mentioned by Luke in Acts 12:12. John Mark was the son of a Mary who lived in Jerusalem in whose house the church met for prayer services (Acts 12:2). Paul said this Mark was the cousin to Barnabas (Col. 4:10 RSV).

Some have thought Mark was the young man who fled naked at the time of Jesus' arrest. Arthur Foster has published a work with Excelsior Publishers on Mark entitled, *The Robeless Spectator.* In view of I Peter 5:13, it is highly possible that Mark was Peter's convert. He was also the subject of a heated controversy between the two great missionaries, Paul and Barnabas. This led to their parting company at the onset of their second evangelistic excursion into Asia Minor (Acts 15:36-41).

Although Mark had deserted them on their first missionary journey, his uncle Barnabas, nicknamed the Son of Consolation, still believed the young unstable Mark had great potential. Taking him under his arm, he nurtured him into the faithful Christian that later wrote this remarkable Gospel. While we do not hear of any further direct relationships between Paul and Barnabas, sometime later Paul did recognize the tremendous worth of the matured young Mark and requested Timothy to bring him to Rome saying that he judged him profitable to his ministry (II Tim. 4:11). In his latter ministry, Mark is believed to have traveled with Peter extensively.

Though many consider Mark the earliest Gospel, this writing seems most suitable shortly after the onset of the Neronic persecution in the spring of 64 A. D. triggered by the conflagration of Rome. Mark's objective may well have been to strengthen the church in the midst of this awful trial. Although it is the briefest of all the narratives, Mark's Gospel is outstanding in its vivid descriptive account of the closing hours of Jesus in Jerusalem and on the cross. Nearly one-third of the entire Book concerns itself with the closing week of Jesus' ministry in Jerusalem and with the crucifixion.

A final note may be added about this Gospel. Mark, nor any of the other evangelists, gave the Gospel accounts the titles they bear today. The name headings were given at some later date. The evangelists were not concerned about gaining personal recognition for their work. Their supreme concern was that the message they felt compelled to tell would be communicated.

1. Mark 16:9-20

Mark 16:9-20 is found only in the margin of some translations. The reason given for this is the ancient Sinaitic and Vatican manuscripts do not contain them. Some claim as early as the 10th century that they were written by an elder name Ariston.

These closing verses, however, were in use in Irenaeus' day (ca. 130-185). Eusebius (ca. 260-340) also quotes from these verses in his writings. This material remains of great worth and is in complete harmony with the rest of the Gospel. It has been protected through the years by the Holy Spirit and is therefore worthy of its place.

Only 7% of the content of Mark is peculiar. Thus, out of 661 verses in Mark, the substance of all but 24 (though not necessarily a word-by-word quotation), is found in the other Synoptics. Matthew, by himself, contains all of the substance of Mark except 55 verses. Mark reports 18 out of Jesus' 35 reported miracles, and also 18 out of Jesus' 70 reported parables. He reports only one major discourse of Jesus. It is notable that although Mark is shorter than the other Gospels, what he does report is not necessarily reduced in length. Out of 51 events or pericopes (e.g. calling of Levi, feeding of the 5,000 etc.) that the three Synoptics have in common, Mark's account is the longest 21 times, Matthew's 11 times, Luke's 10 times, and 9 times the 3 accounts are virtually of equally length. Mark's brevity is not because the book is an abridgement, but because he records fewer events. Notably, one third of his Gospel is devoted to the passion of Christ. —L. Thomas Holdcroft, *The Four Gospels. p. 5*

C. Luke: The global Gospel

Luke was the only Gentile Gospel writer. As observed in Acts, his second book, he was a frequent traveling companion of the apostle Paul. He joined in the great struggle to bring all the nations into full fellowship with Christian Jews. After hearing all the debate and sound reasoning of his beloved companion Paul on the Gentile question of church membership, plus having had fellowship with him in his sufferings for the universal expansion of the faith, it is no wonder that Doctor Luke decided to write a Gospel designed to be read by all men. He begins it this way:

Dear Theophilus:

In this manner Luke addresses his Gospel to Theophilus. It is believed that this man may have been a high ranking Roman official to whom Luke desired to give an orderly account of Jesus' life. Perhaps Theophilus was already a Christian, if not, he may have wanted the document for an official record. More likely he was Luke's patron and paid for the Record to be written. This was common in that day and the author usually addressed the work to his patron. Regardless, Luke broadens his message beyond a Palestinian setting by painting for it an international background. Luke records Jesus' genealogy for the whole world by going beyond Abraham all the way back to Adam, the father of the human race.

For where a testament is, there must be the death of the testator. For a testament is of force after men are dead: otherwise it is of no strength at all while the testator liveth. —Heb. 9:16-17

Luke emphasizes that God's love includes everyone: even the despised Samaritans.

Further evidence strongly depicting the universal style of Luke's Gospel lies in the fact *it is he alone who relates the story of the ten lepers and stresses the one returning to Jesus with gratitude was, of all people, a lowly Samaritan.* Luke wants all to see that the lone soul so deeply appreciative of Jesus' mercy, was one from a despised nation (Lu. 17:16). Again, it is Luke alone who relates the story of the Good Samaritan in 10:30ff.

Luke joins the other Gospels in punctuating the universality of the Word by recording Jesus, with them, saying the Gentiles "*shall come from the east, and from the west, and from the north, and from the south, and shall sit down in the kingdom of God*" (Lu. 13:29). Also, he records the parable of the forgiving father and the prodigal son. It seems obvious that the returning son represents the Gentiles returning to God, while the unforgiving son at home represents those Jews who sought to exclude the Gentiles from divine reinstatement. Is this the jealousy Paul spoke about in the Roman letter that might eventually cause the Jews to repent and turn to Jesus (Rom. 11:11ff)?

Such unique inclusions as these in Luke's Gospel, cause it to be viewed as the message for all people. So, Paul's companion shares his theme in Romans that the Gentiles are also to be recipients of grace. Evidently the "beloved physician," a name given to Luke by Paul in Colossians 4:14, was heavily influenced by observing his love for all races.

Christian Readiness

1. Ready to die (2 Tim. 4:6)
2. Ready to Preach/teach (Rom. 1:15-16)
3. Ready to give an answer (1 Pet. 3:15)
4. Ready to speak only God's word (1 Pet. 4:11)
5. Ready for Christ's coming (*1 Cor. 15*)

D. John: the final Gospel

It is easy to detect a great difference between the Gospel of John and the three other accounts. He includes only about 8% of the material of the other Gospels. John, the beloved disciple, in the latter years of his life makes a tremendous contribution toward laying bare the heart of Christ. One would not want to be without any of the four accounts of Christ's life, but to be deprived of John's message would be an immeasurable loss.

As previously noted, the three first accounts are so nearly alike they are referred to as the Synoptics, or *"see alikes;"* but according to the early church fathers and some terminology John uses, his material comes somewhat later than the other accounts. His material lends itself more to theology than the other three. His emphasis is more on the spiritual aspects of Christ's teaching than his travels and deeds. He records Jesus instructing Nicodemus on the new birth of the Spirit, and proclaiming to the Samaritan woman that "God is Spirit and must be worshipped in Spirit and in truth."

Some contend (with merit) that John is motivated by an underlying purpose to reprove the Gnostic heresy which denied the incarnation of Christ. John selects miracles to support a special contextual message he wants the reader to evaluate.

The reader of John's Gospel is confronted with a style that is direct and simple, yet one that profoundly penetrates the soul. Every sentence is a beckoning invitation to tarry and ponder its intriguing themes. The skill and style of the writer are superb. The capable writer, E. C. Hoskins, writes in his *Fourth Gospel* about John's writing like this:

> *The theme of the Fourth Gospel is the non-historical that makes sense in history, the infinite that makes sense of time, God who makes sense of men and is therefore their Saviour. —E. C. Hoskins*

There is strong concurrence that John is the last Gospel to be written. Most scholars give it a date between 90 and 95 A. D. Over a generation had passed since the resurrection of Jesus.

Jerusalem had already been destroyed by Titus and his Roman armies for more than two decades. It is believed *John* is the first of the five books penned by the beloved apostle in the new Testament.

John modestly does not reveal himself as the writer of the fourth Gospel, but there is a strong tradition that he is the author. The first to name John as the writer of this Gospel was Theophilus of Antioch (ca. 175), and no one has ever successfully challenged him. Church fathers of the fourth century as Origen, Irenaeus, Jerome and Tertullian (ca. 340-420) all agree this is the work of his hands. As close as the book comes to mentioning John as its author is in 21:20-24 where it speaks of "the disciple whom Jesus loved." However, this is a subjective conclusion based on John being that disciple. John seems to have identified himself as that disciple in John 18:16, 19:26 and 20:2-8. James and John were brothers, both sons of Zebedee. Their father was a commercial fisherman. They became disciples of Jesus while they were yet young. Following Jesus' invitation, they immediately left their nets to follow the Man from Nazareth.

They were men of passionate tempers, desiring that Jesus call down fire from heaven to destroy a Samaritan village that refused Jesus hospitality for one evening. Their temper earned them the nickname "Sons of Thunder." However, the following years with Jesus and later years of faithful service transformed this wonderful man's personality into the "apostle of love." By studying closely chapter 2, it is likely John may have been a disciple of John the Baptist. Several of John's disciples graduated from John the Baptist's to Jesus' school, including Andrew. The beloved John stood head and shoulders with the best of the disciples. He, with Peter and James, shared an intimate relationship with Jesus. He stayed close to Jesus during the trial, was present at the crucifixion and took

charge of the care for Jesus' mother at his death. He, along with Peter, visited the empty tomb on the morning of the resurrection. John offers no earthly background of Jesus in his writing. There is nothing of Jesus' youth, no record of his baptism, the wilderness temptation, nor his sufferings in Gethsemane as revealed in the Synoptics. However, John's Gospel ushers the reader along to a climatic decision for belief in 20:31:

". . . *but these [things] are written that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that believing you may have life in his name*" *(RSV).*

1. The flow of John's Gospel.

A close look at John's Gospel reveals the writer's intention to demonstrate how the promises of God to Israel were fulfilled in the Spirit, not the flesh. The Book immediately announces that the creative power of God had manifested itself once again. The same divine word that spoke the universe into existence at the first creation, has now spoken once again. The identical creative power of the Spirit present at the first creation is in Christ, housed (tabernacled) in a human body, living among God's people. Men had beheld the glory of God's presence in Jesus while he "dwelt among men" on earth.

This expression seems to have its roots in the exodus where God tabernacled in the midst of his people during the wilderness wanderings. There they beheld his glory in a cloud by day and a pillar of fire by night. John said the apostles had beheld the glory of God in their midst in Jesus, by beholding the light that had shone forth from him into a world of spiritual darkness (Jno. 1:14). John wrote that the Spirit dwelt in Jesus without measure and he, not John the Baptist, was the promised One who would usher in the new age with a spiritual baptism—not one of water only as John had been administering (Jno. 3:34). Consequently, Jesus is observed turning water into wine in *empty* Jewish purification jars at a wedding in Galilee. Such action provokes deep thought as it sets the pace for the joyous wedding union of the bride (the new faithful Israel) and the new groom, Jesus the Messiah (See Rom. 7:4). God had promised to restore both Judah and the ten tribes to the north (Jer. 31; Hos. 3). This looked quite impossible where Samaria was concerned because they had completely lost their identity by New Testament times. In an interview with Nicodemus, a high ranking Jew of Jerusalem's elite, John reveals how the Jewish restoration will be accomplished. Fleshly lineage is not the key, and is declared to be of no consequence to Nicodemus toward his entering the kingdom of God. *All the faithful would return to God via a new spiritual birth (*Jno. 3:3-5). The more complicated problem lay with the northern ten tribes because they had been swept away by the Assyrians and scattered into oblivion. How could God bring these back as he had promised. By fleshly standards this was impossible. Even though their tribal identity was lost, according to the prophets it would be done regardless of Israel's unfaithfulness to the covenant. Regarding this Hosea prophesies:

> *"For the children of Israel shall abide many days without a king, and without a prince, and without a sacrifice, and without an image, and without an ephod, and without teraphim: Afterward shall the children of Israel return, seek the Lord their God, and David their king; and shall fear the Lord and his goodness in the latter days"* (Hos. 3:4-5).

Jeremiah says this would happen, "*when a woman compasses a man*" (Jer. 31:22). While there has been much discussion about the meaning of this last passage, the marginal reading in the Thomas Nelson large print edition of the KJV says, "*A woman shall lead a man.*" Certainly the Samaritan woman fits the description of Hosea, and the passage in Jeremiah seems to indicate the same.

At any rate, the Samaritan woman did return with the message of Jesus as the Mes-

Outline for Chapter Three

Preexistence, Birth and Early Years

I. Jesus' Preexistence
   A. The genealogies of Jesus
   B. Prophecies concerning the birth of Jesus
   C. The annunciations of John the Baptist and Jesus

II. Jesus' earthly existence
   A. Jesus' earthly parents
      1. Consider Mary
      2. Consider Joseph
   B. Jesus' birth and reception
      1. Those who welcomed Jesus
      2. Mary and Joseph received him gladly
      3. The shepherds were happy at his coming
      4. The Magi travelled far to worship him
      5. Simeon and Anna welcomed him
   C. Jesus' early visits to the Temple
      1. His presentation for circumcision
      2. He had to be legally redeemed
      3. Mary had to be purified
      4. Herod's depravity
   D. Early years at Nazareth
      1. He was lost to his parents
      2. Eighteen years of silence

RUE LIGHT ENTERS
HE WORLD

Chapter Three

Preexistence, Birth and Early Years

O little town of Bethlehem,
How still we see thee lie!
Above the deep and dreamless sleep,
The silent stars go by;
Yet in the dark streets shineth,
The everlasting Light;
The hopes and fears of all the years,
Are met in thee tonight.
—Phillip Brooks

"And the Word was made flesh, and dwelt among us, (and we beheld his glory, the glory of the only begotten of the Father,) full of grace and truth . . . " Jno. 1:14

"Who , being in the form of God, thought it not robbery to be equal with God: but made himself of no reputation, and took upon him the form of a servant, and was made in the likeness of men . . ." Philippians 2:6-8.

1. THE PREEXISTENCE OF JESUS

As far as we know, our existence began with our birth. An Old Testament writer simply states the spirit returns to God who gave it.[1] However, inspiration reveals Jesus did not originate at this moment. The fourth Gospel declares a timeless existence of Jesus before he was born of Mary.[2] Jesus refers to the glory of his preexistent state in his prayer in John 17:5. Later, the writer of Hebrews speaks of a body that was prepared for Jesus.[3]

Paul avows Jesus was with God in the beginning of all things and gave him assistance in the creation of all things.[4] Jesus' Spirit was perfect. Perfect Spirit exists perpetually by the very fact it is perfect. Abiding eternally means much more than timelessness—it means having the nature of perfect quality. Nothing of this world abides forever as there is absolutely nothing perfect in this world. Jesus, as perfect Spirit, became incarnate to qualify himself as an acceptable sacrifice to atone for man's sins. He subjected himself to the weakness of the flesh in order to die for man, but his Spirit remained immaculate. Therefore, Jesus freely surrendered himself—gave himself up to die—making the grace of God appear increasingly beautiful. As a result of Jesus' victory over all fleshly temptations, Peter was able to announce on Pentecost to those who crucified Jesus (Acts 2), that death could not hold him. Having been made perfect by the redemptive power of his blood and the wonder of his grace, the grave can no more hold the Christian than it did Christ. Through the power of his resurrection we are assured that we will be partakers of the same wonder as Jesus!

A. The genealogies of Jesus

The Jew meticulously kept long lists of genealogies which served to establish his identity as a child of Abraham. His genealogy was his pedigree to claim his family inheritance to the blessing of Abraham.[5] The Jew unable to do this was considered an alien to the commonwealth of Israel. William Barclay comments concerning the Jewish pedigree:

> *The Jew set the greatest store on purity of lineage. If in any man there was the slightest admixture of foreign blood, he lost his right to be called a Jew, and a member of the people of God. A priest, for instance, was bound to produce an unbroken record of his pedigree stretching back to Aaron; and, if he be married, the woman he married must produce her pedigree for at least five generations back. These genealogical records were kept by the Sanhedrin. Herod the great was always despised by the pure-blooded Jews because he was half Edomite; and we can see the importance that even Herod attached to these genealogies from the fact that he had the official records destroyed, so that no one could prove a purer pedigree than his own. This may seem to be an uninteresting passage, but to the Jew it would be a most impressive matter that Jesus could trace his lineage back to Abraham.*[6]

Some think there is a problem in the genealogy of Jesus when comparing the records of Matthew and Luke. Skeptics have used the differences in these accounts to cast suspicion on the infallibility of the sacred documents. Some scholarly writers have gone so far as to say that it is impossible to understand the differences, much less reconcile them. A. T. Robertson deals with this problem in an appendix in his book, *A Harmony of the Gospels.*[7] It seems rather obvious that the writers had different purposes. Matthew traced the lineage of Jesus through Joseph, the stepfather of Jesus. Luke follows Jewish tradition by tracing Mary's lineage, using her husband's name in place of hers. Matthew was content to trace his account only to Abraham as this was sufficient for his Jewish audience. Luke, a Gentile writing principally to a Gentile audience, desired to trace the lineage all the way back to Adam where all have a common origin.

B. Prophecies concerning the birth of Christ

Old Testament prophecies concerning the coming Redeemer begin like a small stream, ever widening and deepening through the centuries until it forms a massive river. Although it is beyond the scope of this chapter to list all the prophecies concerning the coming of the Redeemer, a chart containing some references is located on page 55.

Genesis 3:15 has been called the protevangelion (oldest Gospel) because it contains the earliest prophecy of the coming of the Messiah:

> *And I will put enmity between thee and the woman, and between thy seed and her seed; it shall bruise thy head, and thou shall bruise his heel.*[8]

MATTHEW TRACED THE LINEAGE OF JESUS THROUGH JOSEPH, THE STEPFATHER OF JESUS. LUKE FOLLOWS JEWISH TRADITION BY TRACING MARY'S LINEAGE, USING HER HUSBAND'S NAME IN PLACE OF HERS.

4

Identifying Marks of the Messiah in Genesis 3:15

(CA. 4,000 B.C.)

1. **THE MESSIAH'S VIRGIN BIRTH—"HER SEED."**

2. **A PERPETUAL SPIRITUAL WARFARE—"PUT ENMITY BETWEEN THY SEED AND HER SEED."**

3. **THE MESSIAH'S VICTORY OVER SATAN'S POWER OF DEATH—"IT SHALL BRUISE THY HEAD."**

4. **THE MESSIAH WOULD SUFFER IN THE PROCESS—"THOU SHALT BRUISE HIS HEEL."**

The seed of the human race is supplied by the male, yet man is not mentioned in Genesis 3:15.

Enmity is placed between the seed of the serpent and the Seed of the woman. Paul, speaking of the Abrahamic promise in Galatians 3:16, said that the "Seed," a singular noun, referred to Jesus.

Moses, in Genesis 3:15, reveals a perpetual struggle will continue between those who reject the word of God and those who obey it. The Old and New Testaments present a continuous history of this struggle which reaches its climax when Jesus gains victory over Satan in the resurrection. Although the war rages on, the decisive battle for all of us has been fought and won by Jesus.

The bruised head inflicted by Jesus signified the binding and ultimate destruction of

the serpent's destructive power over the human race. The painful bruised heel inflicted by Satan was his blow against Jesus at the cross which healed itself in the resurrection. So, according to Moses, Satan was stripped of his power by the Seed of the woman.

About 2000 B.C., God vowed to Abraham: "*I will make thy seed to multiply as the stars in the heaven, and will give unto thy seed all these countries; and in thy seed shall all the nations of the earth be blessed.*"[9]

Over 700 years before the Messiah, Isaiah's prophetic trumpet sounded this announcement:

> *Therefore saith the Lord God, Behold, I lay in Zion for a cornerstone, a tried stone, a sure foundation: he that believeth shall not make haste. Judgment will I lay to the line, and righteousness to the plummet: and the hail shall sweep away the refuge of lies, and the waters shall overflow the hiding place. And your covenant with death shall be disannulled, and your agreement with hell shall not stand; when the overflowing scourge shall pass through, then ye shall be trodden down by it.*[10]

These same words repeated later to Abraham's children, Isaac and Jacob, gave the Israelites hope in the eventual reality of the promised blessing by Jehovah. About 1500 B.C., four hundred years after these patriarchs, Moses' heart was lifted in joy when God said to him:

> *I will raise them up a Prophet from among their brethren, like unto thee, and I will put my words in his mouth; and he shall speak unto them all that I shall command him. And it shall come to pass, that whosoever will not hearken unto my words which he shall speak in my name, I will require it of him.*[11]

The psalmist David sang about 1000 B.C.:

> *The Lord hath sworn in truth unto David; he will not return from it; of the fruit of thy body will I set up my throne.*[12]

Isaiah, the prince of prophets, delivered the following messianic message to Israel:

> *For unto us a child is born, unto us a son is given: and his name shall be called Wonderful, Counselor, The Mighty God, the Everlasting Father, The Prince of Peace.*[13]

About 750 B.C. Isaiah spoke of the birth of the Messiah using the Hebrew word *almah* to designate the maiden that would bring the Messiah into the world.[14] This word can correctly mean a young woman of marriageable age, but it does not prohibit the thought that the woman may be a virgin. In the 8th century when Isaiah was writing, especially among the Hebrews, *virginity would be commonly understood to be the normal status of any young woman reaching marriageable age.* This is exactly how the inspired writers of the New Testament understood this prophecy, for in referring to this matter they chose the Greek word *parthenos which can only mean a virgin.* Regarding this, Gresham Machen says on page 288 in his great work, *The Virgin Birth of Christ* :

> *It has been urged, indeed, on the one hand that the Hebrew language has a perfectly unmistakable word for virgin, "bethulah," and if virgin had been meant, this word would have been used. But, as a matter of fact, there is no place among the seven occurrences of "almah" in the Old Testament where the word is clearly used meaning a woman who was not a virgin. It may be readily admitted that "almah" does not unequivocally indicate virginity, as does "bethulah," it means rather "a young woman of marriageable age." But on the other hand one may well doubt, in view of the usage, whether it was a natural word to use of anyone who was not in point of fact a virgin.*

In referring to this, both Matthew and Luke by inspiration chose a form of the Greek word *parthenos* that can only mean "virgin." The Holy Spirit did not leave anything to

question on the intended meaning in Isaiah 7:14. Many other Old Testament prophecies concerning Jesus were fulfilled at his coming. A few examples can be seen on the chart below:

11

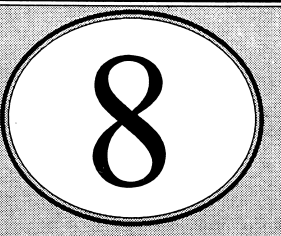
PROPHECIES CONCERNING THE COMING OF CHRIST

HIS BIRTHPLACE AT BETHLEHEM		MIC. 5:2
HIS FLIGHT TO EGYPT		HOS. 11:1
HIS PRIESTHOOD		PSA. 110:4
HIS REJECTION BY JEW AND GENTILE		PSA. 2:1
HIS BETRAYAL BY A FRIEND		PSA. 41:9
THE EXACT FEE FOR HIS BETRAYAL		ZEC. 11:12
HIS AWESOME SUFFERING		ISA. 53
HIS DEATH WITH CRIMINALS		ISA. 53:9
HIS BONES UNBROKEN	PSA. 34:20 EX. 12:46	JNO 29:33
HIS BURIAL AMONG THE RICH	PSA. 16:9	MT. 27:58
HIS RESURRECTION		PSA. 16:10

Along with over 300 other prophecies, those in the above chart foretold the coming of the Redeemer. These prophetic promises were the source of constant hope to Israel while they endured the most cruel subjugation by their enemies.

C. The Annunciations of John the Baptist and Jesus

The Old Testament closes with Malachi speaking of the great prophet who would suddenly come heralding the arrival of the day of the Lord. Jesus said this prophecy spoke of John the Baptist.[15] Luke 1:5 says this was fulfilled in the days of King Herod the Great of Judea who ruled from 37 B. C. to 4 B.C. After reading the account of the annunciation and birth of John the Baptist in Luke 1:5-25, the following eight things presented on the chart below are readily discernible. John the Baptist will be discussed more fully later.



THINGS ABOUT JOHN THE BAPTIST IN LUKE 1:5-36

1. BEING 6 MONTHS OLDER THAN JESUS, JOHN'S BIRTH COULD NOT HAVE BEEN LATER THAN 4 B.C., THE DATE OF HEROD THE GREAT'S DEATH.
2. BECAUSE ELIZABETH WAS BARREN, HIS BIRTH WAS IN ANSWER TO PRAYER.
3. BEING UNDER THE NAZARITE VOW, JOHN WAS ESPECIALLY DEDICATED TO GOD (NU. 6:3).
4. THE BIRTH MESSAGE WAS BROUGHT BY THE ANGEL GABRIEL.
5. HIS NAME WAS TO BE JOHN (MEANING GOD IS GRACIOUS).
6. HE WOULD TURN MANY OF THE ISRAELITES TO THE LORD.
7. HIS MOTHER ELIZABETH AND MARY THE MOTHER OF JESUS WERE RELATED.
8. SIMILAR TO ABRAHAM AND SARAH, BOTH ZACHARIAS AND ELIZABETH WERE VERY OLD TO BEAR CHILDREN.

By comparing the annunciations of the births of John and Jesus, some striking contrasts can be seen. A study of these will help one better understand why John preached: "*He that cometh after me is mightier than I, whose shoes I am not worthy to bear . . .*"[16]

For example, when the angel announced John's birth to Zacharias his message was: "*Thy wife shall bear thee a son, and thou shalt call his name John. . . .*" *(Lu. 1:13).* However, note the superior tone in the announcement made to Mary concerning the birth of her son: "*Thou shalt conceive in thy womb, and bring forth a son, and shalt call his name Jesus. He shall be great, and shall be called the son of the Highest: and the Lord God shall give him the throne of his Father David; and he shall reign over the throne of Jacob forever; and of his kingdom there shall be no end*" (Lu. 1:31-33).

Note the following contrasts drawn from these two texts:

Luke 1:13:

1. Elizabeth was to bear *Zacharias* a son.
2. His name would be "John" (meaning God is gracious).

Luke 1:31-33:

1. Mary was to bear a son of the *Highest.*
2. His name would be "Jesus" (meaning *Saviour.* See also Matt. 1:21).

Thus it was signified from the beginning to the women who received the announcement that great as John was to be, he would be far inferior to Jesus.

Jesus said of John: "*Among them that are born of women there has not risen a greater than John the Baptist: notwithstanding he that is least in the kingdom of heaven is greater than he.*"[17] No such comparative comment was ever made of Jesus as there was none with whom to compare him. Pilate said that he found no fault in him. The centurion stated at the cross that Jesus surely was the Son of God, and Jesus challenged those that interrogated him to produce a single sin he had ever committed. Even Judas declared his innocence: "*I have sinned in that I have betrayed innocent blood*" (Matt. 27:4). Jesus' enemies bear strong testimony regarding his true identity. They, of all people, would have produced a fault by a valid witness if one could have been found. When they could not produce one single charge, they sought false witnesses to lie against him at a mock trial and later paid others to lie about the disappearance of his body (Matt. 28:13). The Scriptures present John the Baptist as *the son of Zacharias.*

They present Jesus as *the Son of God.* John's Gospel, while setting forth John the Baptist as a great prophet, records abundant testimony, both negative and positive, concerning the identity of these two men. John denies he is the Christ (Jno. 1:20), then testifies *positively* that Jesus *is* the Son of God (Jno. 1:29-37). Ordinary men attain divine sonship by grace through faith. Jesus *sustained* his divine Sonship by keeping his perfect Spirit without sin.

II. JESUS' EARTHLY EXISTENCE

A. The Earthly Parents of Jesus

Of all the descendants of David one may wonder why Joseph and Mary were selected to be Jesus' parents. Their strong character traits are evident in the Scripture. Especially is this seen in the holy couple's response to the divine announcements indicating why, among all other people, they were chosen for this great privilege. Note the following lovely character traits.

1. Consider Mary.

One can readily observe the humble, obedient character of Mary in her response to the angel's message: "*Behold the handmaid of the Lord; be it unto me according to thy word.*"[18] She responded quickly without any apparent thought of the gossip and ostracism which would surely come from her neighbors and former friends.

Neither did she stop to consider the effects the discovery of her pregnancy would have on Joseph, her fiance, which could cost her her marriage to him and ruin her chances for a good husband for life. In fact, had it not been for the intervention of God who revealed to Joseph the truth concerning Mary's pregnancy, these things would have happened. Throughout it all, Mary abandoned herself in total surrender to Jehovah's will.

2. Consider Joseph.

According to Jewish law, Mary's and Joseph's contractual relationship bound their engagement almost equally to marriage. To forsake a betrothed was the same as forsaking a spouse. Adultery was grounds for a divorce. If either of a couple was guilty of this sin it could be reported to the priest who would issue a grant allowing the guilty person to be put away. Before the appearance and explanation of the angel, Joseph seriously considered this. It appeared obvious under normal circumstances that Mary's pregnancy could only be caused by unfaithfulness. Joseph knew he was not the father. Had Joseph pressed the law to its fullest he could have had Mary stoned. Feeling betrayed by one pledged for marriage has motivated many to take harsh measures. Joseph's decision to put Mary away *privily,* sparing her the certain ill she would face, offers supporting testimony to why he was called a "just man."[19] Such concern and tenderness for Mary, when he had every legal right to punish her, portrays lofty character which indicates why Joseph was chosen to be the foster father of Jesus the Son of God. In response to a decree issued by Augustus Caesar that all should be taxed, Joseph and Mary, late in her pregnancy, traveled nearly 80 miles from Nazareth to Bethlehem where civil records of their family were kept. It was here in Bethlehem that Mary gave birth to Jesus, fulfilling God's promise to them and to the entire world (Gen. 3:15).

B. Jesus' birth and reception

Jesus' birth would have been a very lowly one indeed even for an ordinary earthly king. The world's rejection of our Lord began when the couple was told by the innkeeper (perhaps visually alerted to the pressing need of the couple) that there was "no room in the inn."[20] Rejection by the innkeeper was a prologue to that which awaited Jesus for the rest of his life. This ill reception for our Lord was summarized in John's Gospel like this: "*He came to his own and his own received him not.*" [21] What a pitiful reception for the Creator of the universe.

The world has always been preoccupied, aloof and self-centered when addressing the real needs of Jesus. Because this city was the designated census center by Augustus Caesar for registering the descendants of David, great numbers pouring into the small city had filled all the inns to capacity. Caesar's decree demanded that all return to their home towns for registration. This particular day must have been very trying on the nerves of the innkeeper.

A lot of pushing and jostling must have occurred in dealing with the demands of the public. Seeing that all customers were properly situated and cared for until all rooms were filled must have been truly trying. With all the available space taken, the master of the inn was eager to call it a day—just relax and get away from it all. He was certainly in no mood for another problem.

Throughout the centuries the unexpected arrival of Jesus at one's door in the form of a needy person has brought many problems to untold thousands. He brings countless blessings as well, but frequently these are only

realized in the wake of much pain and agony. It seems that Gethsemanes must precede the joy of a resurrection.

Wife in labor or not, the innkeeper would not ask any of the paid guests to inconvenience themselves for this poor couple. Even in an emergency it was "first come first served," for him. This has been the philosophy for many since the first opportunity for gain. He was not asked for space in his private quarters but we think we know what he would have done had he known that this baby was truly the Son of God who would die for his sins. People seldom know in advance when Jesus' needy representative will come knocking on the door.

The Hebrew word "Bethlehem" means "house of bread." What would the innkeeper have done had he known this little babe of Bethlehem was the Bread of eternal life. However, one should not be too critical, for had we been there in his ignorance, we may well have been as indifferent as the innkeeper. After all, in a very true sense the innkeeper represents all the din and clang of modern traffic and the yelling and ranting in the stock exchanges around the world today. Preoccupation with "buying and selling and getting gain," as the Old Testament prophet said, is that which shuts Jesus out of so many lives. Assisting fellow men in need is the very substance of Christianity. Most would comply at some convenient time if it did not inconvenience them much in their schedule. Such are often rather decent moral people like the rich man in Luke 18 who had kept the good commandments all his life. Regardless of this, he still felt a great need in his life. When Jesus told him filling the vacuum in his life would take full discipleship, he could not bring himself to abandon all for Jesus. The decision did not leave him completely unmoved for he "went away sorrowfully," but when faced with the greatest decision of his life—to trade material wealth for spiritual treasure—he simply could not do it. Nevertheless, Jesus looked upon him and loved him. (Matt. 19:20; Mk. 10:20; Lu. 18:21).

But the innkeeper did do something. He offered them a place in the animal shelter. Bulging with the animals of the pilgrims, the stable presented a most humble setting for the King of kings and Lord of lords to make his entrance into the world. Regardless, some were still watching for his coming and welcomed him gladly.

1. Some welcomed Jesus.

While many of his own race did not welcome Jesus into the world he created, some did rejoice. Who were some of them?

2. Mary and Joseph received him gladly.

The mother of Jesus rejoiced at his birth. Note Mary's response when she was called to serve God:

> *And Mary said, My soul doth magnify the Lord, And my spirit hath rejoiced in God my Saviour. For he hath regarded the low estate of his handmaiden: for, behold from henceforth all generations shall call me blessed. For he that is mighty hath done to me great things, and holy is his name. And his mercy is on them that fear him from generation to generation. (Lu. 1:46-50).*

As a devoted Jewish mother, Mary must have taught Jesus his very first prayers. Commenting on the crucifixion, William Barclay says there is reason to believe that the last words Jesus spoke from the cross—"Father, into thy hands I commend my spirit"—were a part of a child's prayer that Jewish mothers taught their little children. This, he says, may well be where the Saviour first learned these words.[22] He also points out that some of Jesus' parables, such as the parable of the leaven (Matt. 13:13), must have had their setting in Mary's kitchen.

Mary welcomed Jesus even though sorrow lurked silently inside her heart. Simeon had prophesied to her when she presented Jesus at the Temple: "*Yea, a sword shall pierce through thy own soul also.*"[23] How this lovely woman must have grieved as she recalled Simeon's words each time she heard a new rumor that the Sanhedrin was seeking Jesus' life for breaking their traditions.

Joseph's happiness is observed by his immediate reponse to the angel's request. He proceded with wedding plans and forgot his fears. He believed Mary was a virgin and that she had conceived by the Holy Ghost.

3. The shepherds were happy at his coming.

These rugged outdoorsmen were already acquainted with one of the most beautiful psalms in Jewish literature—the Shepherd Psalm of the Old Testament (Psa. 23). One is touched at both the beauty and deep significance of the announcement scene of Christ's birth to the shepherds. Even a deeply spiritual mind exercised in a selfless search of God's will can only begin to fathom the profundities surrounding the announcement to the shepherds. Of all people on earth why were these plain-living folk, who were busy tending their sheep, chosen to be the first to have Jesus' arrival revealed to them? Perhaps it was because the *Chief Shepherd* was coming into the world to seek and save his sheep.[24] Such is the mission of Jesus as presented in John 10. Who would be more suited to receive the announcement with deep spiritual meaning and to convey salvation to all New Testament readers for centuries to come than these lowly shepherds guarding their sheep through the night? These shepherds represent perfectly all average folk. They picture the loving care the Chief Shepherd has for each of his sheep.[25]

4. The Magi travelled far to worship him.

These wise men from the east had seen a sign in the heavens denoting the birth of a great king. These men were the early astronomers—scholars of the heavens in their day. One night as they gazed heavenward, a star brighter and more different from any they had ever seen suddenly flashed into view. Convinced this signified that a great king had been born, they followed its guiding light westward to where it finally stood still over Bethlehem. After inquiring and eventually finding the baby king Jesus, they rejoiced greatly, giving him regal gifts of gold, frankincense and myrrh (Lu. 2:10ff).

They were men of daring and courage who left each of us a tremendous example in their search for Jesus. In a sermon entitled, "Are You as Wise as They?" George Bailey lists the following marks of wisdom characterized by these men:

1. *They were interested in the Christ.*
2. *They were eager to suffer for Christ.*
3. *They didn't have to be begged to search.*
4. *They searched for themselves.*
5. *They were not too proud to seek help.*
6. *They were content with the light from heaven.*
7. *They listened to God, not man.*
8. *They paid whatever price neces sary.*
9. *They never gave up until they found Jesus.*
10. *Finding Jesus, they worshipped him.*
11. *They proved their sincerity by their gifts.*[26]

What a challenge these wise men have presented to the world in every age!

5. Simeon and Anna welcomed him.

Simeon and Anna represent the faithful of God who go gently about the business of quietly watching for Jesus. These are overshadowed by the spectacular religionists who love to call attention to themselves by outer display. The Pharisees wore broad phylacteries on their sleeves in which they brandished impressive scrolls of scripture. They also feigned piety in other ostentatious displays such as keeping an unkempt appearance during fasts.[27] Jesus rebuked them for wearing their religion on their sleeves rather than in their hearts, and for making a pretense of piety while denying God in doctrine (Matt. 15:8-9).

The Pharisees especially were concerned with the outward appearance of religion while the scribes were concerned about keeping the letter of the law. The aristocratic Sadducees

were the conservatives, the right wingers, who played safe politics with Rome in order to keep their national interests intact. They opposed the Pharisaic tradition and held only as sacred literature the Torah, the five books of Moses. They rejected any belief in angels or spirits, or resurrection from the dead.[28]

There were also the Zealots who sought to accomplish their political ambitions to throw off the hated yoke of Rome. They won their name because they would not hesitate to eliminate a lone Roman soldier with a dagger they kept concealed in their robes.

But the Simeons and the Annas who went quietly about the business of watching for the coming Messiah composed the main remnant of Jehovah's faithful. Even as they, *we also must look night and day for the next return of the consolation and redemption of true Israel.* Behold! He is coming.[29]

C. Jesus' early visits to the Temple

Shortly after the birth of a Jewish male, three ceremonies for the family fell due at the Temple. While presence was optional for one, the other two required parents to bring their child to Jerusalem.

1. His presentation at the Temple for circumcision.

Since the sealing of the covenant with Abraham, all male Jews had to be circumcised on the eighth day following birth. The Jews took great pride in this fleshly mark as a sign of God's guarantee of the Abrahamic blessing, regardless of one's heart condition. Sadly, irrespective of the prophets warnings, the majority came to believe this and stumbled over the liberal attitude of Jesus concerning the Gentiles.[30] There arose a heated controversy over circumcision in the New Testament church. It grew so intense that a general conference was called at Jerusalem in an effort to settle the controversy (Ac. 15). Because circumcision had been given only to the *Jews under their Old Testament system* on the basis of faith, it was decided at this great Jerusalem assembly that *believing Gentiles* under the New Covenant would not have to submit to an Old Testament ordinance.

Under the new spiritual covenant, circumcision was a removal of sin from the heart by an operation of God himself.[31] True to the Jewish faith, Jesus' parents were diligent in submitting their son to all the requirements of the law. Jesus said later: "*Thus it becometh us to fulfill all righteousness*" (Matt. 3:15). It was at the ceremony of circumcision that the Jewish child received his name. On this occasion our Lord was given the name *Jesus,* meaning Saviour, which the angel from heaven had revealed for him. The name signified the nature of Jesus' mission on earth to save the lost. (Lu. 19:10).

2. Jesus had to be legally redeemed.

According to the Law of Moses, the firstborn son in every Jewish family had to be "redeemed" by a five shekel fee payable at the Temple. This fell due thirty-one days after birth. Waiting thirty-one days was to make sure the month had run its full length. Attendance at the Temple to pay the fee was not required because the redemption money could be paid directly to any priest.

3. His mother had to be purified.

The purification rite of the Jewish mother came forty-one days after the birth of a son, and eighty-one days after the arrival of a new daughter. According to Rabbinic law, this could not occur earlier than the set number of days, but it could come any time afterward. A portion of Alfred Edersheim's explanation of this purification ceremony follows:

The sin offering was, in all cases, a turtledove or a young pigeon. But while the more wealthy bought a lamb for a burnt offering, the poor might substitute for it a turtledoves, or a young pigeon. The rubric directed that the neck of the sin-offering was to be broken, but the head not wholly severed; that some of the blood should be sprinkled at the southwestern angle of the altar. The whole of the flesh belonged to the priest, and had to be eaten within the enclosures of the sanctuary. . . The substitution of the latter (pigeon) for a young lamb was expressly designated "the poor's offering."[32]

4. Herod's depravity.

Sometime after the family had completed these requirements of the law at Jerusalem, Joseph was warned to flee to Egypt because Herod, king of Judea, sought the life of the young child. Insanely jealous over his little kingdom, this aging petty monarch had issued an order to slay all male children in Bethlehem from birth through two years old to make sure his insane order included Jesus. Since we know that Herod died in 4 B.C., this ugly event assists in dating the year of Jesus' birth. Even if the order was issued in the year of Herod's death, Jesus would have to be born as early as 4 B.C. If it took the entire two year span of Herod's decree to include Jesus' age, his birth could have been as early as 6 B.C.[33]

Because history contains no record of this ugly deed by Herod, some historians try to discount the slaying of the Bethlehem babies. Many things, however, which have been dismissed by skeptics as having no historical basis have been later proved to be fact by archaeology. One need only recall the dispute that raged over the historicity of Belshazzar, king of Babylon during the Persian conquest mentioned by Daniel the prophet, as one example.

Herod was a despicable character who slew his own wife and sons in a jealous and suspicious rage. He had to appeal to Caesar for the legal permit to put them to death. Caesar gave permission, but expressed contempt for Herod's actions, saying, "It is better to be Herod's pig than to be his son."[34]

Knowing the base character of this petty monarch, the Christian has no problem with accepting the Bible account of the Bethlehem baby massacre in full faith. Additional evidence that shows this man was capable of anything is seen in this madman's orders to have many reputable citizens killed on the day of his death to insure there would be mourning in the land. While good sense prevailed and this did not happen, it indicates the depths of Herod's depravity.

Joseph's fears of Herod caused him to return his family to Nazareth by way of Egypt. This, Matthew says, was the fulfillment of a prophecy stating that Jesus would be called out of Egypt and also be called a "Nazarene."[35]

One plausible explanation for the baby massacre not making it into the annals of history is that such killings were common in the life of this intolerant tyrant and did not really constitute anything out of the ordinary for this ugly man. History tends to record its extraordinary events, but this was just considered something to be expected in the life of Herod. Also, *perhaps no historian wanted to take the risk of Herod's ire.*

Civil authority may well have been applied to keep such a thing from being recorded. One should remember, that just as many other things have been disputed to be historical and later proved authentic by archaeological discovery, just so this horrible act may be revealed one day. Whether the spade will ever support this biblical testimony or not, the inspired writers, along with what history reveals of this king's deviant personality, provides sufficient evidence for believing the performance of such a demonic act was entirely in keeping with his personality.

III. THE EARLY YEARS AT NAZARETH

Very little is known of the first thirty years of Jesus' work. There are many legends in apocryphal writings about Jesus engaging in boyhood pranks with his miraculous powers. These are only spurious and absurd stories told by writers whose material is devoid of the spiritual depth and quality inherit in the canonical books.

We do learn that at twelve, like all other Jewish lads of that age, Jesus attended the religious festivals at the holy city with his parents.[36] The Gospels record at this time Joseph and Mary leaving Jerusalem on their return trip to Nazareth thinking Jesus was in the company of friends. When they discovered he was not among the company traveling back to their home village, they began a frantic search that lasted three days. They eventually found Jesus at the Temple in Jerusalem discussing the law with the scholars of Judaism. When they expressed their concern for his whereabouts, Jesus' only reply was: "*How is it that ye sought me? Wist ye not that I must be about my Father's business?*"[37] These first recorded words of Jesus in the Gospels are a beautiful example for young people of all time. They bring to mind the words of the preacher: "*Remember now thy Creator in the days of thy youth . . .*"[38]

Eighteen years of silence follow this brief account of Jesus' life at the age of twelve. After finding Jesus at the Temple, the Record states that Jesus was in continued subjection to his parents: "*He was subject unto them: and his mother kept all these things in her heart. And Jesus advanced in wisdom and stature, and in favor with God and men*" (Lu. 2:40). John testifies that much more could have been written about Jesus' life (Jno. 20:30-31). However, Jehovah was providing for us a highly condensed Book on the subject of redemption—not a lengthy encyclopedia of religious knowledge. It is difficult enough to stimulate sufficient interest among the masses to read the brief accounts we have, but what if there were endless volumes, as the apostle John said, that would fill the world?

Although there is little written about the early years of Jesus' life in Nazareth, some things at that early age can be gleaned from the Gospels from indirect references about his varied experiences. We know he was well acquainted with outdoor life because of multiple references to the grass, flowers, birds, their nests, sheep, goats, vineyards and fields being white unto harvest. His experiences as a young carpenter in the shop of his earthly father shines through in Matthew 11:28 where Jesus invites all to come to him. "My yoke is easy," he said. "Easy" meant to fit well, or smoothly. Jesus designed his yoke to make it non-injurious to the animal's shoulders when bearing heavy burdens. In this there is the beautiful thought of a disciple's taking upon himself Christ's "well fitting" yoke, thus enabling him to bear the burdens of life with the least amount of suffering.[39] Jesus lived a full life in and around the small town of Nazareth. His varied experiences permeate the teaching of his public ministry.

"One Things" Stressed in the New Testament

√ "One thing thou lackest" (Mk. 10:21)
√ "One thing is needful "(Mk. 10:42)
√ "One thing I know" (Jno. 9:25)
√ "One thing I do" (Phil. 3:13)

References

1. Ecclesiastes 12:7
2. John 1:1-4
3. Hebrews 10:15
4. Colossians 1:11-18
5. Genesis 12:1ff.
6. William Barclay, "The Gospel of Matthew," *The Daily Study Bible Series,* vol. 1 (Philadelphia; The Westminster Press, 1958) p. 2
7. A.T. Robertson, *A Harmony of the Gospels* (New York, London: Harper and Row, Publishers, 1950) p. 259
8. Genesis 3:15
9. Genesis 26:3-4
10. Isaiah 28:16-18
11. Deuteronomy 18:18-19
12. Psalms 142:11
13. Isaiah 9:6
14. Isaiah 7:14
15. Matthew 11:13-14
16. Matthew 3:11
17. Matthew 11:11
18. Luke 1:38
19. Matthew 1:19
20. Luke 2:7
21. John 1:11
22. William Barclay, *The Mind of Jesus,* (New York: Harper and Row, 1961) p. 243
23. Luke 2:35
24. I Peter 5:4
25. Luke 15:4-7
26. George Bailey, "Are You as Wise as They," *Great Preachers of Today,* ed. J.D. Thomas (Abilene, Texas: Biblical Press, 1961) p. 127
27. Phylacteries, also frontlets. Capsules of leather worn on the forehead and the left upper arm containing parchments of Scripture. See also Matthew 23:5-6. Consult a good Bible dictionary.
28. Acts 23:6-9
29. Matthew 24:42; 25:13; Luke 12:37; Revelation 10:15
30. Matt. 8:11-12
31. Colossians 2:11
32. Alfred Edersheim, *The Life and Times of Jesus the Messiah,* pp. 195-196, *Op. cit.* previous p. 27
33. A. T. Robertson, p. 262, *Op. cit.* (See ref. 7 above .)
34. William Barclay, "The Gospel of Matthew," *The Daily Study Bible Series,* Vol. 1 (Philadelphia; The Westminster Press, 1958) p. 20
35. Matthew 2:23
36. Luke 2:42ff.
37. Luke 2:46
38. Ecclesiastes 12:7
39. William Barclay, "The Gospel of Matthew," *The Daily Study Bible Series,* Revised ed., vol. 2 (Philadelphia; The Westminster Press, 1975) p. 17

Supplementary Readings

Culver, Robert Duncan. *The Life of Christ* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Baker Book House, 1976) pp. 37ff.
Machen, J. Gresham. *The Virgin Birth of Christ,* Second Edition. (New York & Evanston: Harper and Row, 1932)
Morgan, G. Campbell. *The Crises of the Christ* (Old Tappan, New Jersey: Fleming H. Revell Co., 1903) pp. 67-95
Robertson, A. T. *Epochs in the Life of Jesus* (New York: Charles Scribner and Sons, 1907) p. 192
Smith, David. *In the Days of His Flesh; The Earthly Life of our Lord and Saviour.* Twelfth edition. (London: Hodder & Stoughton, 1917) p. 549

Questions for Chapter Three

1. List the prophecies given concerning Christ and their fulfillment.
2. How is Jesus' social life reflected in his teachings? Give some examples.
3. How do we know that Joseph and Mary were considered poor?
4. Discuss the character traits in Joseph's and Mary's lives that helped qualify them as Jesus' parents.
5. Why should there be no misunderstanding concerning Jesus' *virgin* birth?
6. What purpose did the genealogy listings serve for Matthew and Luke in their Narratives?
7. Make a comparison in the annunciations of John the Baptist's and Jesus' birth. What are some striking differences in them?
8. Discuss the reception Jesus received in the world when he came.
9. Discuss the preexistence of Jesus.

Outline for Chapter Four

The Friend of the Bridegroom

I. John the Baptist
   A. The character of John the Baptist
   B. Why the ordinary people heard John
      1. John was a man of power
      2. John had the traits of a great preacher
         a. John's preaching was extremely practical
         b. John made it plain there could be no compromise
         c. John's dynamic preaching reflected the authority of God
      3. John was absolutely sure of his message
      4. John's sermons were not flamboyant and self serving
         a. John avoided clever phrases and novel remarks
         b. John's preaching was always relevant and fresh
      5. John was a man of dauntless courage
      6. John was a noble man with a magnificent preacher's attitude

II. John the Baptist's Mission
   A. His mission was not to establish Christ's church
   B. The purpose of John's baptism
   C. John the Baptist, Essenes and the Dead Sea Scrolls
      1. The Importance of the Dead Sea Scrolls
         a. These documents antedate existing manuscripts 1,000 years
         b. No appreciable alteration exists with later documents.
      2. No solid evidence connects John with the Essenes
         a. Their clothing was different
         b. The Essenic "washings" were self-administered and repeated
   D. John's Baptism of Jesus was unique
      1. John's baptism was limited to Israel

III. When Does a Passage Apply to Us?
   A. Three rules that help determine this
      1. Who is speaking?
      2. To whom is the text speaking?
      3. When was it spoken?

IV. Six Baptisms Are Mentioned in the Bible
   A. The baptism unto Moses
   B. The baptism of suffering
   C. John the Baptist's baptism
   D. The baptism of the Holy Spirit
   E. The baptism of fire
   F. The baptism of The Great Commission
      1. Summary

A VOICE IN THE WILDERNESS

Chapter Four

The Friend of the Bridegroom

John, that which man
a grand or greater
not until this day
has been born;
John, like some iron peak
of the Creator
fired with the red glow
of the rushing morn.
—W. H. Myers

1. JOHN THE BAPTIST

In fulfillment of the Old Testament prophets, a voice finally rang out across the southern valleys in the craggy hills of the Judean wilderness.[1] The New Testament uses the word "voice" to depict the nature of John's calling.

It is the Holy Spirit's word of choice to describe John's prophetic message.[2] John's "voice" was God calling Israel back to himself in repentant life, heralding the dawning of the prophetic "last days." He was to prepare a remnant of faithful Jews for the new, long-promised Kingdom of God or, as Matthew chose to say, the Kingdom of Heaven.

Through the prophets, God had been calling Israel to repent for centuries. The present call announcing the coming of the Messiah and his Kingdom, was essentially "love's final and ultimate appeal." It was God breaking dramatically into history to send his son to die for the sins of the world. It was fitting that God's Son would have a special herald to announce his arrival. John was that chosen person—the man God prepared to herald the Man for the hour.

Fourteen hundred years had passed since Moses prophesied that God would send a prophet like himself to speak words in his name.[3] Over seven hundred years had passed since Isaiah revealed a new kingdom would eventually spring forth from Mount Zion (Isa. 2:2).

By the time John the Baptist finally appeared, four hundred years of prophetic silence had slowly dragged by since the last Old Testament prophet Malachi had proclaimed these words:

Behold I will send my messenger, and ye shall prepare the way before me: and the Lord whom ye seek, shall suddenly come to his temple, even the messenger of the covenant whom ye delight in . . .[4]

The wilderness where John began his ministry occupied the southern area of Judea south of Jerusalem. It was bordered eastward by the southern end of the Jordan River and below by the Dead Sea. Here, in this sparsely settled area, John appeared in rustic apparel declaring the Kingdom of Heaven to be at hand.

In strict keeping of his Nazarite vow, the prophet confined his diet to locusts and wild honey.[5] He reproved the Jewish nation for its sins and demanded all Jews to "repent and be baptized" in preparation for entering the kingdom of heaven, which, he avowed, was at hand.

There was absolutely no compromise in John's preaching. All had to put away every sin or face the impending wrath of God. He referred to the despised publicans (tax collectors) and sinners (the common folk of his day) as being justified by God when they had received baptism for the remission of sins. In stark contrast, he reproved the Pharisees and lawyers as having "*rejected the counsel of God against themselves, being not baptized of him*" (Lu. 7:29-30).

Far from being "a reed shaken by the wind," John wielded God's word in his preaching like a trained soldier handling a sharp sword, cutting thousands of Jewish hearts to the core of their consciences for better or for worse—for better when they received his baptism of repentance, and for worse when they rejected it against themselves.[6]

A. The Character of John the Baptist

It is impossible to find adequate words to describe the courage and conviction of this man. Jesus told his disciples that of all those ever born, John had no equal (Matt. 11:11).

Of course, Jesus was excluding himself. In his book, *Christ Above All*, Doctor Robert E. Lee delivers a powerful and eloquent description of this great preacher. Here is a brief excerpt of his comments:

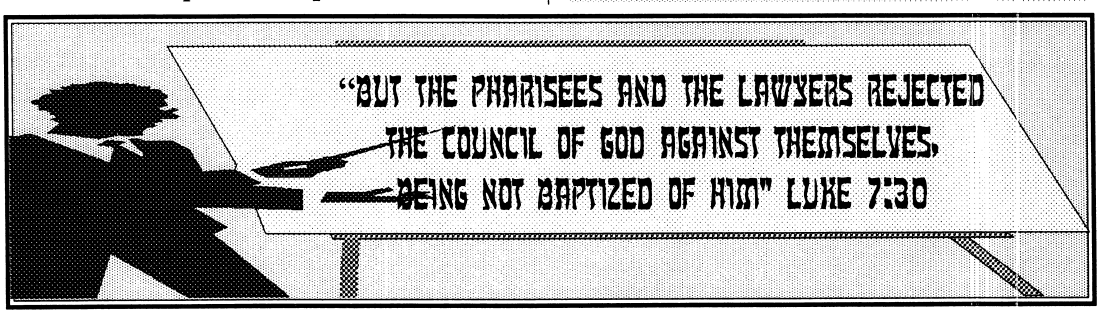
John the Baptist—descending upon the iniquities of his day with a torch in one hand and a sword in the other.

John the Baptist—the blood of fifteen hundred years of priests flowing in his veins.

John the Baptist—speaking mostly in judicial tones as his words were sharp arrows that pierced the hearts of prating formalists, artful hypocrites, political tricksters, sceptical and gross materialists.

John the Baptist—bearing no credentials from the learned rabbis, exhibiting no diplomas from the schools in elocution, receiving no honorary degrees from the Jewish Sanhedrin.

John the Baptist—preaching for a verdict and getting it as is shown by multitudes who "went out to hear him from Jerusalem and all Judea and all



the region round about Jordan, and were baptized of him in Jordan—confessing their sins.—(Matt. 3:5-6)

John the Baptist—to whom was entrusted the delicate task and responsibility of interpreting the voice of betrothal as a friend of the bridegroom.

John the Baptist—concerning whom Jesus said: Among them that are born of women there has not risen a greater than John the Baptist. (Matt. 11:11—concerning whom the Angel of the Lord spoke to Zacharias, saying: "Thou shalt call his name John . . . for he shall be great in the sight of the Lord . . . and he shall be filled with the Holy Ghost, even from his mother's womb. And many of the children of Israel shall he turn to the Lord their God (Lu. 1:13-16).

John the Baptist—seeing Jesus coming unto him said: Behold the Lamb of God, which taketh away the sins of the world (Jno. 1:9).

John the Baptist—baptizing Jesus in the rolling waters of the Jordan River, at which time the heavens were opened unto Jesus, and a voice from heaven said: This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased (Matt. 3:16-17).

John the Baptist—speaking in these words: He must increase, but I must decrease. He that cometh from above is above all (Jno. 3:30-31).[7]

When we consider the character and ability of John, we do not marvel that Jesus paid him the greatest compliment ever spoken of anyone born under the Old Testament system. Jesus added, however, that the "*least in the kingdom of heaven is greater than he.*"

B. Why the ordinary people heard John

They did not hear John because of impressive credentials from the Sanhedrin, nor because he dressed himself in their traditional scholarly trappings. Why did they listen? What brought so many out into the wilderness to hear John's scathing preaching?

1. John was a man of power.

The people could readily see John the Baptist was an unusual herald of the word of God. He was vastly different from the traditional instructors of the law—the professionals in Judaic indoctrination. The listener was immediately convinced John had been with God and that his concern was for the lost souls of men. His distaste for the world's sinful state was equally apparent.

Under the most favorable conditions, it is a monumental task for a preacher to arrest the attention of the world by using only the word of God. Without an observable sincere respect for God's word and a genuine personal spiritual relationship with the Lord, the task is next to impossible.

Because of its powerful appeal to massive audiences, the television industry has attracted both the good evangelist and the covetous hypocrite. However, as no other medium, television reveals to the world the phony Gospel merchandiser. "*By their fruits, ye shall know them,*" Jesus said.

No doubt, John the Baptist's ministry would have survived and profited with the medium of modern television, but it is doubtful he would have wanted it. Rather, television would have likely solicited John to promote itself. While everyone who experiences a deep encounter with God does not come away as Moses did with his face shining,[8]

Stages of the Christian Experience

1. Cleansed by the blood (Rev. 1:5)
2. Clothed in righteousness (Phil. 3:9)
3. Crowned with glory (Rev. 4:4)

still, daily communion with God does establish for itself a valid observable credibility. Such credibility is not established by the ability to speak in a jargon referred to as an "unknown tongue," but by having a "*thus sayeth the Lord*" manifestly written upon the heart and borne out in strong character. Ezekiel had an astounding influence upon the children of Israel during the Babylonian exile. Note the essential qualification for his successful ministry in Ezekiel 37:1: "*The hand of the Lord was upon me.*" This language is descriptive of a deep fellowship between Ezekiel and the Lord of heaven. It is a tremendous asset in the ministry of God's communicator when those about him perceive he obviously is a man in touch with the truth of God. This will open hearts and cause them to be receptive to the truth when everything else fails. When sound teaching by such a servant of God will not open a heart, nothing will likely captivate it for salvation.

2. John had the traits of a great preacher.

(a) *John's preaching was extremely practical and straight to the heart and called for immediate decision.* Those who heard John's preaching were made to feel it was backed fully by God's authority. Successful preaching must make the listeners aware that the authority behind the message is not the mere opinion of the preacher, but the will of God.

(b) *John made it plain that there could be no compromise with God's righteousness.* Only faithful submission would endow one with God's blessings. This does not mean the penitent will have all problems solved immediately, or that all sacrifice and suffering are past. Because they are under a new divine authority, new Christians are subjected to new fiery temptations. Also, successful preaching afflicts one's conscience, knowing that rejecting the message brings God's righteous judgment.

(c) *John's dynamic preaching reflected the authority of God in that he made his hearers feel the presence of Jehovah.* This also characterized Peter's preaching. In Acts 10, after the New Age had come, those among the household of Cornelius awaiting Peter's message were certain what he would speak would be the word of God. When Peter arrived in Caesarea, Cornelius said: "*Now therefore we are all present before God to hear all things that are commanded thee of God.*"[9] Effective preaching always makes the hearer aware of the divine source of the message.

3. John was absolutely sure of his message.

With unwavering certainty John cried out: "*I am the voice of one crying in the wilderness, Make straight the way of the Lord, as said the prophet Esaias,*" (Jno. 1:23) and, "*Repent ye, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand* " (Matt. 3:2).

John preached against sin. Rather than being voices that "cry out" the word of God, many seem to be merely crying out about something. Some cry over personal grievances, others about pet hobbies or projects, some voices cry out on politics and turn their pulpits into political sounding boards; but few, as John, cry out against the malignancy of sin in personal lives while offering, by God's grace, the choice of repentance or doom. Such preaching is never popular. For many churchgoers, entertainment is now in. Gospel preaching alone is out. This is a "thrill me" consumer generation. To keep the pews packed, many pulpits offer worship services that would make some theatres envious. They seek entertainment in worship to escape boredom. Presenting a spirited assembly seems to be equated by some to be spiritual worship. Equating outward movement in worship with spirituality has been imported by well-meaning youth directors from the camp experience. None should interrupt others at worship who are in quiet reflection at such moments as during the Lord's Supper (I Cor. 14:30; 40).

John attracted an audience because he singularly preached God's grace and judgment with utter conviction. His focused preaching led to a tremendous revival among

God's people. It is said that he baptized "*all of Judea and the region round about Jordan.*"[10] James says: "*A double minded man is unstable in all his ways*" (Jms. 1:8). Being convinced and focused, John was stable—preaching without reservation. Joshua of old cried out to the vacillating Israelites: "*Choose you this day whom ye will serve.*"[11] Paul, likewise, warns all Christians: "*Be not tossed to and fro, and carried about with every wind of doctrine, by the sleight of men, and cunning craftiness, whereby they lie in wait to deceive.*"[12] If God's spokesman has the slightest doubt that his message is straight from God via the Holy Scriptures, he severely limits his effective presentation. John preached God's word quite exactly. Someday this sobering question may well be asked all ministers before the Holy Tribunal: "*Did you preach my explicit Gospel quite explicitely*" (See II Cor. 11:3)?

4. John's sermons were not flamboyant and self serving.

(a) *John avoided clever phrases and novel remarks.* John's preaching was void of cute expressions and novel remarks intended to provoke applause and laughter so characteristic of the "send-me-your-love-offerings" pulpiteers today. He preached straight from the heart with earth-shaking sobriety. He cared nothing about his own popularity and poll ratings with the crowds—the disease of much modern preaching today. In preaching like John's lies the power of true Gospel preachers. Such preaching doubly underscores the grace of God for the penitent and chills the innermost recesses of the sinner's heart with the impending judgment of God.

This type of preaching later rang out from the apostle Paul as he testified before a lascivious and hypocritical governor: "*And as he reasoned of righteousness, temperance, and judgment to come, Felix trembled . . .* " (Acts 24:25) Such preaching is deplored by many moderns.

The shameful thing about so much of today's preaching is its infection with the deadly virus of popularity raging in epidemic proportions. This disease is spread by both popular and would-be popular preachers pushing and jostling for the lucrative pulpits of the larger congregations.

(b) *John's preaching was always relevant and fresh.* Although John's preaching was in complete accord with God's prophets before him, it was new in comparison with the messages they normally heard. The people had been accustomed to hearing the intellectual scribe's arid sophistries and the aloof Pharisees delivering long-winded intricate expostulations of their traditions.[13] But John was different. His preaching was like Amos' preaching seven centuries before who said:

> *The lion hath roared, who will not fear? The Lord hath spoken, who can but prophesy?*[14]

5. John was a man of dauntless courage.

There was nothing boring about John's message. The common folk heard him thunder out to the elite scribes, the proud Pharisees and the arrogant Sadducees these words:

> *O generation of vipers, who hath warned you to flee from the wrath to come? Bring forth therefore fruits meet for repentance.*[15]

Petty, immoral kings came under the attack of John's spiritual sword. King Herod tried to flatter John, but when the covetous monarch took his brother Philip's wife for his own, showers of approbation could not cause this lion of God to look the other way. Quite the contrary, John rebuked him, saying: "*It is not lawful for you to have her.*"[16] Preaching without respect to persons cost John his life at the hands of this little king. John was uncompromising and fearless because he had placed his future with the King of kings.[17]

Courage is an absolute essential for the preacher of righteousness. He struggles desperately in the midst of a hostile world

dedicated to unrighteousness. Fears lurk everywhere, constantly threatening to engulf him, while Satan, a roaring lion, launches constant attacks against him directed squarely at every weakness.[18]

6. John was a noble man with a magnificent preacher's attitude.

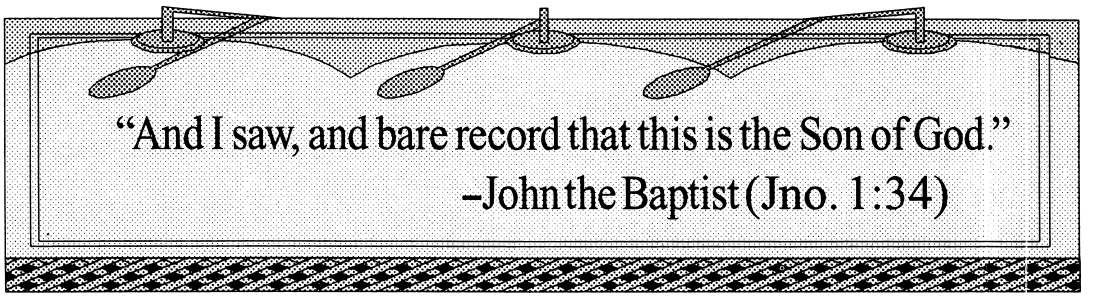
John displayed a beautiful attitude toward Jesus during their contemporary ministries. Preachers should take special notice of this. Sadly, some of the most able preachers have manifested petty attitudes with others when they felt they were being overshadowed by preachers of greater ability. Feeling insecure and threatened, these ministers cannot tolerate any praise or notoriety of their colleagues. This was King Saul's great sin. It was quite all right for the public to shout David's praises as long as they limited David's victories to less than Saul's, shouting David had slain only thousands while Saul had slain tens of thousands. But the moment the people reversed the order, Saul became intensely jealous of David and immediately sought to slay him, the best supporter and friend he had.[19]

John the Baptist provides ministers a tremendous example regarding relationships between preachers. John's popularity was extremely high when Jesus came on the scene. Even though he had confessed from the very beginning that he was neither the Christ nor Elias the prophet, many still believed he was the promised Messiah. Regarding Jesus' denial of John being Elias to come, Jesus must have understood more about John's ministry than John himself.[20] John knew his work would be eventually eclipsed by Jesus and announced the sunset of his own career with these simple words: "*He must increase, but I must decrease.*"[21]

Some of John's disciples did not share their prophet's views. They argued with Jesus' disciples over the matter of purification and lamented that all men were beginning to follow Jesus.[22] Regardless of all this, John displayed magnanimous character by not exploiting the avid devotion of his followers for his own glory. When his disciples began to complain that Jesus was making more disciples than their own school, and that all men were being drawn to him, John reproved them, telling them bluntly that Jesus' star would eclipse his own. John did absolutely nothing to keep his disciples from leaving his ministry to follow the more popular preacher. He perfectly understood his ministry as being *the friend of the Bridegroom, i.e.* to see that the new marriage went well. Barclay refers to John's attitude in all this as "*the loveliness of John's humility.*"

> *It was clear that men were leaving John for Jesus. John's disciples were worried about it. They did not like to see him abandoned while the crowds flocked out to hear and see this new Teacher . . . it would have been very easy for John to have felt injured, neglected and unjustifiably forgotten. Sometimes a friend's sympathy can be the worst possible thing for us. It can make us feel sorry . . . and encourage us to think that we have not had a fair deal. But John had a mind above that.*[23]

John describes his place in history affectionately as being the friend of the Bride-



groom."[24] The "the best man" at a wedding, as we say today, is a supportive friend who assists the groom. John's mission was to introduce the bride to her groom, telling her she needed to bathe herself in a spiritual cleansing in view of their upcoming marriage. One is reminded of the compulsory cleansing baths for betrothed queens before their marriage to kings (Est. 2:12). Once his purpose was served, John was content to bow out. What an example!

II. JOHN THE BAPTIST'S MISSION

A. His mission was not to establish Christ's church.

John was already dead when Jesus promised the disciples he would build his church. The word "church" means *called out,* or *assembly.* Jesus called his disciples out, sanctifying them (setting them apart) from the world. He instructed them in the responsibility of preparing the Jews to receive their Messiah and their entrance into the kingdom of heaven. Every disciple's sanctification is accomplished through obedient faith.[25] Being baptized for the remission of sins separates him from defilement by being washed in the cleansing blood of Jesus.[26] Later, after Jesus' blood was shed, Paul said this "calling out" occurs when the disciple believes and responds to the invitation of the Gospel (I Thess. 1:14). He wonderfully relates the disciple's calling in orderly detail in Romans 10. Those becoming members of his body of believers, the church, would by the same act of obedient faith become citizens of the new kingdom of heaven. In Matthew 16:18, the words "church" and "kingdom" are used interchangeably. Those in the Colossian church were translated into the kingdom when they became Christians (Col. 1:13-14). Obviously John the Baptist was never in Christ's church, the kingdom of heaven, for these reasons:

(1) *Jesus said none born of women was greater than John, yet the least in the kingdom of heaven would be greater than he.*[27]

(2) *John was dead before Christ ever promised to build the church* (Matt. 16:18, Cp. Matt. 14:3ff.).

After the church was established in Acts 2, the inspired writers always called the church by a name that *glorified the groom, not the friend of the bridegroom.* Descriptive phrases used were church of God, churches of Christ, or similar expressions denoting ownership, allegiance and honor to *the divine name.* By wearing the name of Christ, the bride of Christ (the church) honors her husband.[28] There is, Peter said, "*None other name under heaven given among men whereby we must be saved.*"[29] Denominating the body of Christ has given rise to hundreds of names used to honor and identify new doctrines. When a name other than Christ's is given to his church it promotes divisions and dishonors the preeminence of Christ. Such practices totally disregard both Christ's prayer and Paul's plea for unity of all believers in Christ.[30]

Believers of various Christian denominations agree that the non-party names used in the Bible by the early Christians to designate the body of Christ are acceptable. However, there is much disagreement concerning names that do not honor Christ but rather only give identification and honor to party doctrine. (I Cor. 1:10ff.).

B. The Purpose of John's Baptism

The purpose of John's baptism was clear: all Israelites must confess their sins if they were to enter the soon to appear kingdom of heaven. John was searching for the good soil—those hearts that would confess sins and thus provide a welcoming body for the coming King. Many asked the prophet what they must do to correct their lives. Upon their confession of sin, John baptized them in Jordan. After receiving John's baptism, they were a prepared citizenry within Israel anxiously awaiting the Messiah and the kingdom of heaven to appear. They were not disappointed. One day where John was baptizing in Jordan, the Lamb of God appeared, and to fulfill all righteousness identified himself with sinners in submitting to baptism.

C. John the Baptist, the Essenes and the Dead Sea Scrolls

John began his ministry suddenly in the southern regions of the Dead Sea. Some believe he received much of his background and training from the Essenes at a village named Qumran which lay in this area. They, like the Pharisees, Sadducees, Herodians and Zealots were a Jewish sect. They could be found in the cities and rural areas but seemed to favor a type of monastic order. Qumran on the western banks of the Dead Sea has been excavated. It is known today as Khirbet (meaning ruins) Qumran. Here in some nearby caves, several scrolls of literature were discovered in 1947 by an Arab shepherd looking for a lost sheep. These manuscripts have been called the Dead Sea Scrolls, sometimes simply abbreviated DSS.

1. The importance of the Dead Sea Scrolls.

(a) *These documents push back the date of all existing manuscripts by nearly 1,000 years, reaching as far back as the second century B.C.* This means the Qumran documents now provide texts to compare later manuscripts, such as the Massoretic texts bearing dates between 500 to 1,000 A.D.

(b) *There is another important factor in the discovery of these documents: studies have shown no appreciable alteration took place in these texts during the lapse of an entire millennium.* This helps refute the idea that no reliable documents exist today due to an abundance of copyists' errors. Due to the great contribution of these documents we have new grounds for additional assurance that our extant manuscripts are reliable copies of original Biblical literature. One should bear in mind that no *copy* of the autographs is inspired—*only the original documents have this divine authority.*

2. No solid evidence connects John with the Essenes.

While several similarities can be made in John the Baptist's ascetic life and that of the Essenes, there are also many striking differences. These differences are sufficient to disassociate any connection between the Essenic denominational beliefs and John's divine mission.

(a) *Their clothing was different.* John's clothing consisted of camel's hair and a leather girdle about his loins, the Essenes wore white robes. This alone would have been sufficient to exclude him from their community. Nevertheless, by drawing various analogies some still insist there is a direct link between John and the Essenes, but one should remember that similarity does not mean identity.[31]

Similarities exist between some Christian practices and pagan religions, especially the mystery religions of Persia; but similarity is no more proof that Christianity has roots in these eastern religions than to conclude that the pyramids in Egypt and the North American Indian mounds are related simply because they both have domes.

Analogies can be made of philosophies having ranges as broad as the Sahara. Regarding any identification of John the Baptist with the Essenes, F. F. Bruce says:

> *Such a reconstruction belongs more in the realm of fiction than to real history . . . When the word of God came to John the Son of Zechariah in the wilderness (Lu. 3:32), as it had come to many a prophet before, he learned and proclaimed the necessity of something more than the teaching of Qumran.*
>
> —*F. F. Bruce*[32]

The Essenes practiced ceremonial cleansing associated with their washings in water. They also placed great emphasis upon a holy life which must accompany such washings; but to say this was the source of John's message and purpose for baptizing is going too far.

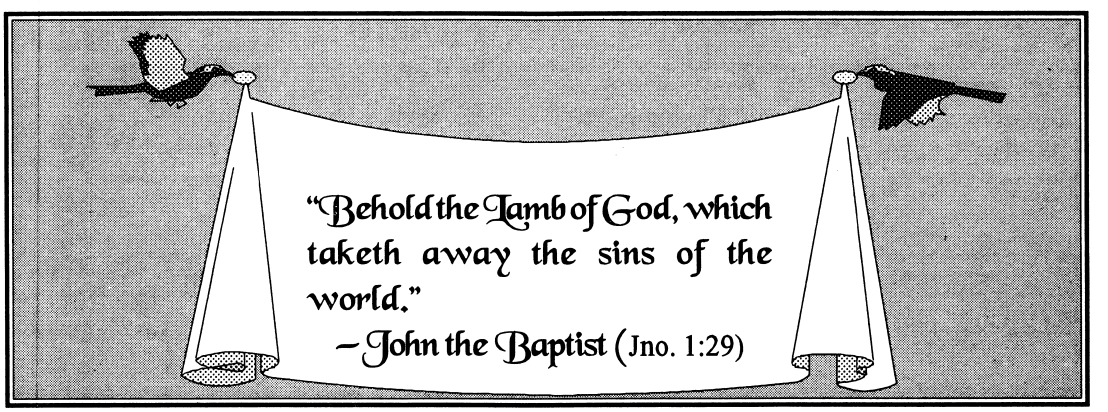
(b) *The Essenic washings were self-administered and repeated.* John's baptism had a separate administrator and was undertaken once only. John's calling was from God alone and had no other basis for its authority.

D. John's baptism of Jesus was unique

The hour finally arrived for Jesus to emerge from his secluded life at Nazareth. Suddenly he appeared on the banks of the Jordan where John was baptizing. By previous revelation, John knew that in some way the Messiah would be revealed to him but he was not sure how and who he would be (Jno. 1:31-32).

John recognized at once the holiness of Jesus when he saw the Holy Spirit hovering over him in the form of a dove and heard the confirming voice from heaven. Except for Jesus, all John's candidates had to confess their sins before baptism.[33] At Jesus' first request to be baptized, John declined. Feeling a deep sense of humility in the presence of Jesus' pure Spirit, John suggested that Jesus baptize him. Our Lord did not rebuke John for offering this suggestion; rather, he agreed with his kinsman. Still, he insisted that John should comply with his request, saying: "*Suffer it to be so now: for thus it becometh us to fulfill all righteousness.*"[34]

Jesus did not submit to John's baptism as a sinner, but because he came to fulfill the righteous plan of God,and baptism was a part of that plan. The purpose of Jesus' incarnation was to obey the Father in all things and thus provide a perfect example for all men to follow. This included receiving John's baptism. Also, it was one of many ways in which Jesus identified with sinful man. Although Jesus could not be baptized for the remission of sins like the other candidates, he was baptized to *remain* perfect, to refrain from sinning. Jesus was not baptized to become a son of God by faith like others were, but was baptized *to remain the Son of God by faith.* John's baptism was part of the righteousness of God Jesus came to fulfill.



Jesus was subjected to all weaknesses of the flesh, yet he demonstrated perfection in all his ways; therefore Jesus said to John: "*permit it to be so now.*" The word "now" indicates that his submission to baptism was an exception to the rule. Of all John's candidates for baptism, this could only be said of Jesus because he alone was without sin.

John obeyed his Lord's request, gently immersing him in Jordan. This righteous act was confirmed when the Holy Spirit descended upon Jesus in the form of a dove and a voice from heaven was heard saying: "*This is my beloved Son in whom I am well pleased.*"[35]

This baptism must have been glorious to behold—to see John and hear him express his unworthiness to baptize his Lord. Even though part of John's mission included the lofty deed of baptizing his Lord, the act engulfed him in such humility that it made him feel unworthy to loosen the straps and bear Jesus' sandals (a task reserved for slaves). By being baptized, Jesus identified himself again with sinful man. The Pharisees had rebuked him for mingling daily with sinners. He eventually was executed as a common felon between two thieves. In every way Jesus learned and earned the right to be a "*fit mediator between God and man.*"[36]

A COMPARISON OF JOHN'S BAPTISM AND THE BAPTISM OF THE GREAT COMMISSION

JOHN'S BAPTISM	THE GREAT COMMISSION
1. Under the Old Covenant era (Heb. 9:16-17)	1. Under the New Testament era (Matt. 28:19ff.)
2. Was in the name of God only	2. In the name of the Father, Son and the Holy Spirit
3. Faith in Jesus' resurrection was not essential	3. Faith in Jesus' resurrection was essential
4. A confession of sin preceded	4. A confession of Christ precedes
5. Only to the Jewish nation	5. Is to all nations
6. Unrelated to the new birth	6. Wholly related to the new birth
7. Looked for the first coming	7. Looks to the second coming
8. Christ's blood not yet shed—no perfect atonement	8. The perfect atoning blood is available
9. Baptism was not "into Christ"	9. Baptized "into Christ" (Rom. 6:4)
10. Not baptized into the New Testament church (Acts 2:38)	10. Baptized into the church—added to it (Acts 2:41)
11. No one received the gift of the Holy Spirit	11. All receive the gift of the Holy Spirit
12. No one was baptized/translated into the kingdom of God.	12. Believers are translated into the kingdom of God (Col. 1:13-14)

The chart on the previous page depicts vast differences between John's baptism and that of the Great Commission[37] which must not be confused. However, there are these striking similarities: the prerequisite of repentance (Mk. 1:4; Acts 2:38), immersion of candidates (Mt. 3:16; Jno. 3:23; Ac. 8:38-39; Rom. 6:3-4), each baptism was "for the remission of sins" (Mk 1:4; Acts 2:38), and rejection of either baptism was considered self condemning (Lu. 7:29-30; Mk. 16:16).

The chart (page 76) lists twelve differences between these two baptisms. This helps to understand why Paul later commanded certain disciples at Ephesus to be rebaptized because they "*knew only the baptism of John*" (Acts 19:1ff).

1. John's baptism was limited to Israel.

Although John's baptism is recorded in the New Testament, his ministry was pre-New Testament and confined to the Old Testament era. The baptism of the Great Commission (to all nations) became effective after the death of Christ.[38]

The Gospels are records of Jesus' life, but both John and Jesus lived and died as Jews under the Old Testament system. They offered sacrifices, worshipped at the Temple and kept the Jewish law. However, Jesus refused to keep their traditions.[39]

V. WHEN DOES A PASSAGE APPLY TO US?

A. Three rules that help determine this

Knowing which of these baptisms was administered under the New Covenant is extremely important because it determines which baptism is applicable for the Christian era. We are told to study to "rightly divide the truth."[40] A great division occurs between the end of the Old Covenant and the beginning of the New. Everything spoken in the Bible is not bound upon those in the Christian era. To determine the relevancy of a text, observe the following procedure. While reading the text ask yourself the following three questions:

1. Who is speaking?

Notice whether it is God, man, or even Satan doing the speaking. Not everything spoken in the Bible is from God, nor necessarily the truth. While everything in the Bible is *a true account* of what happened, some of it, depending upon its source, can be a clever and deliberate lie (such as that told Adam and Eve in the Garden of Eden by Satan). Eve believed the lie and disobeyed God. All mankind and nature came under the penalty of death.[41]

2. To whom is the text speaking?

The context may be speaking exclusively to an individual. God gave a specific command to Noah to build an ark (a large ship) about 5,000 years ago. Christians are not required to do this. Naaman, a Syrian leper, was told by God's prophet to dip seven times in the river Jordan for the cure of his disease. While this worked for him, it will not work for other lepers. It was spoken solely to Naaman (2 Kgs. 5). It is not a relevant command for anyone else.

3. When was it spoken?

When Jesus spoke the saving grace to the penitent thief dying on the cross beside him, he said specifically to him: "*Today shalt thou be with me in Paradise.*"[42] If the man had not obeyed John's call for baptism before this

moment, he certainly could not do so now. However, *that did not void the command for all others of the day to be baptized of John.* Also, just because the thief on the cross was saved without receiving baptism is no reason for sweeping this command aside for those who are now subject to New Testament baptism (Heb. 9:16ff.). The command to go into all the world and baptize every creature was not given until after Jesus was resurrected from the dead (Mk. 16:16-18). The thief was not obligated to keep a command given after his own death. He died under the Old Testament system (Heb. 9:16-17). Christians will be judged by all things spoken to them under the Christian system after the death of Jesus.[43]

For 1500 years the Jewish law remained in effect calling for animal sacrifices, temple worship and circumcision (ca. 1446-30 A.D.). Isaiah, Micah, Joel, Jeremiah and others prophesied of the new spiritual age and covenant which would supersede the old legal system (Isa. 2; Micah 2; Joel 2; Jer. 31:31ff). Those born since the death of Christ and the inauguration of the Christian Covenant are not under the law, but under the system of faith and grace made valid by the death and resurrection of Jesus.[44]

VI. SIX BAPTISMS ARE MENTIONED IN THE BIBLE

Which of these baptisms is applicable in the Christian age? Various baptisms have occurred for different people at different times in the Bible. By keeping in mind the questions discussed in the last section, one can determine which of these six baptisms is relevant for a person living in our day and age. First, note the occurrences and nature of the six baptisms.

A. The baptism unto Moses

This baptism occurred when Moses led the children of Israel across the Red Sea to escape the slavery of the Egyptian Pharaoh (ca. 1448 B.C.). This deliverance was to establish Israel as a nation to serve God (I Cor. 10:2).

B. The baptism of suffering

In Mark 10:38 Salome, the mother of James and John, not understanding the nature of the new kingdom, requested special offices for her sons in the new order. Jesus replied: "*Ye know not what ye ask. Are ye able to drink of the cup that I shall drink of and be baptized with the baptism that I am baptized with?*"[45] In this passage Jesus was speaking of his passion and death.

Because of their unwillingness to compromise the Gospel, some of Jesus' most faithful disciples took up their crosses and followed him in this baptism. Paul said to Timothy: "*He that liveth godly in Christ Jesus, shall suffer persecution*" (II Tim. 3:12). *Fox's Book of Martyrs* records brief accounts of this terrible baptism of suffering. (Note the supplementary reading list.)

C. The baptism of John the Baptist

This baptism in Matthew 3:1ff. is the main subject of this chapter. The baptism practiced by Jesus during his public ministry was an extension of this baptism in that those who submitted to it also looked for the immediate coming of the kingdom (Mk. 1:15).

Also, since both Jesus' and John's baptism were exclusive to Jews, this period has been called the "*baptism of the limited commission.*" Of course, one chief difference was—John preached Jesus as the Christ, the Lamb of God but he never accepted such messianic titles for himself.

D. The baptism of the Holy Spirit

The baptism of the Holy Spirit (Matt. 3:11) *was not a command to anyone,* neither was it promised to everyone. It was a promise given to the apostles by the Lord and received by them on the day of Pentecost.[46]

Christ promised to send the baptism of the Spirit to fill the apostles with the power of the Holy Spirit.[47] This would serve at least three purposes:

1. *He would not leave them comfortless* (orphans, Jno. 14:16-18, NIV).
2. *It would bring to their remembrance all things he had taught them* (Jno. 14:6).
3. *It would confirm their message as God's word.*[48]

It can be determined by reading Acts 10 and 11 that these signs convinced Jewish believers of God's intentions to include the Gentiles in the kingdom of heaven.

E. The baptism of fire

This is a warning to the disobedient and will be received by all who persist in impenitence (Matt. 3:11). Its element is fire[49] and its design is everlasting punishment after death.[50] It is graphically and horribly described by John in Revelation 20. It is sad that hell, the spiritual location for this suffering in the afterworld, is mocked by unbelievers who constantly use the word as well as the God of heaven's name, for cursing.

F. The baptism of the Great Commission

This baptism is for every believer living under the new covenant of Christ (Matt. 28:18-20; Mk. 16:15; Acts 2:38). It is a command given by Christ after his death to all penitent believers.[51] Prerequisites for receiving this baptism are faith, repentance and a public confession of Jesus as God's son (Mk. 16:15-16; Acts 2:38; Rom. 10:9-10). Its element is water and symbolizes the death of the old sinful man, his burial, and resurrection to a new life in Christ (Rom. 6:3-4; Col. 2:12). The design of this baptism is "for the remission of sins" (Acts 2:38, "unto" in the RSV). Relating the story of the conversion of Saul in Acts 22, Luke states that Ananias, a Gospel preacher, told him what he must do in these words:

> *Arise, and be baptized, and wash away thy sin, calling on the name of the Lord* (Acts 22:16).[52]

Later, Paul (Saul) said this salvation is by virtue of the blood of Christ, not the element of water.[53] This does not negate its essentiality. In a profound spiritual application defying adequate explanation, the atoning blood of Jesus becomes effective for the penitent soul entering into a faithful covenant relationship with Christ. Believers are baptized into Christ's death.[54] The blood that came from Christ's side at his death was mingled with water.[55] This was the mystery of cleansing in the command to Saul to "*arise, and be baptized, and wash away thy sins.*"[56] Whenever this happens to any penitent convert, it is said that God adds him to his church.[57]

> *Since the Ephesian letter, there is only "one baptism" for converts* (See Eph. 4:5).

While there are six baptisms mentioned in the Bible at various times and places for different

people, Paul explicitly declares in Ephesians that *only one baptism was valid at the time of his writing that epistle* (ca. 64 A.D.).[58] The baptism of the Holy Spirit (recorded in Acts 2) announced the arrival of the kingdom of God. On that day penitent *Jewish* believers were commanded to be baptized in water for the remission of their sins; therefore, two baptisms were in effect at that time (about 30 A.D).[59] These two baptisms were still in effect at the *Gentile* household of Cornelius.[60] These two occasions, when both the baptism of the Holy Spirit and baptism in water for the remission of sins were received, mark the fulfillment of Joel's prophesy stating that God's Spirit would be poured out upon "all flesh,"[61] *meaning both Jew and Gentile.* The Gospel was preached in this order:

> *For I am not ashamed of the Gospel of Christ: for it is the power of God unto salvation to everyone that believeth; to the Jew first, and also the Greek (Rom. 1:16).*

On these two occurrences, at Pentecost and the house of Cornelius, the "pouring out" of the Spirit upon representatives of all humanity fulfilled Joel's prophecy. Each race receiving the baptism of the Holy Spirit signified to all (especially the believing Jews) that citizenship in the kingdom of heaven had been made available to every penitent baptized believer regardless of race.[62] This was a divine indication that both Jew and Gentile were now joint heirs in Christ and fellow heirs of the kingdom of God. This, Paul said to the Ephesians, was the mystery revealed to him which had been kept secret from the foundation of the world.[63]

This mystery was fulfilled in Christ, God's promised Seed to Abraham to bless "all nations."[64] When the purpose of Holy Spirit baptism had been accomplished and the New Testament had been confirmed by the Spirit's miraculous manifestations, these signs began to wane and finally ceased. Consequently, Paul could say in Ephesians 4:5 that there was only one baptism. To make certain all understood that the baptism to remain was "water baptism," the apostle made specific reference to it as follows:

> *That he might sanctify and cleanse it by the washing of water by the word, that he might present it unto himself a glorious church, not having spot, or wrinkle, or any such thing; but that it should be holy and without blemish (Eph. 5:26-27).*

1. Summary

In addition to the information presented in the comparative chart on John's baptism and New Covenant baptism, some things now may be given in more detail which will prove most helpful:

1. *Baptism in the Holy Spirit enabled its recipients to perform miracles.*

2. *Those receiving this baptism (the apostles), could transfer the miraculous gifts to others by the "laying on of hands" (Acts 8:14-17).*

3. *But those receiving the gifts of the Spirit by the "laying on of the apostles' hands," (as Philip in Acts 8), could not transfer this power.*

When Jerusalem heard of the great success of Philip's campaign, they sent Peter and John to the work in Samaria. On arrival, they prayed and laid their hands on the believers that they might receive the power of the Holy Ghost. Apparently the power to impart supernatural gifts was reserved for the apostles who had been baptized with the Holy Spirit. Consequently it may be safely concluded that:

WHEN THE LAST MAN DIED UPON WHOM THE APOSTLES LAID THEIR HANDS TO RECEIVE THE MIRACULOUS GIFTS, THE SUPERNATURAL GIFTS CEASED.

Nevertheless, Simony persists. Its modern representatives are greedy spiritual merchants, posing as gospel preachers, hawking their miracles on the religious market like cheap trinkets at a flea market sale.

4. *The basic purpose of Holy Spirit baptism was to confirm the divine authority of the early preachers (Mark 16:20).*

During the miraculous confirmation period, the Holy Spirit inspired various men to write epistles to the first century Christians. Paul remarked that each of these manuscripts composed only a "part" of the New Testament (I Cor. 13:9-10). When all "parts" were written, the "parts" would compose the "perfect" (complete) New Testament revelation of God.

As the New Testament grew to completion, it provided churches with the authority they needed for edification. Miraculous confirmation of the oral word was no longer needed as this was now done by inspired writings. Consequently, when miracles had served the purpose for which they were intended (confirmation of the Christian doctrine), they gradually subsided. This may be observed in the New Testament where a peak in miracle performance is reached early in the Book of Acts, then slowly ebbs away until there is hardly a mention of them by the close of the epistles.

Now, for two thousand years, all first century apostolic doctrine has been confirmed. Near the close of the New Testament Jude proclaimed "the faith" to be "*once for all delivered to the saints*" (Jude 3, RSV). Christians are to walk by faith and not by sight (II Cor. 5:7). The true faith comes only by hearing the Word that was confirmed two millenniums ago (Rom. 10:17; Acts 2:42). Paul gave detailed instructions to the Corinthian church concerning the demise of the supernatural gifts in 1 Corinthians 13:8-13.

That which abides forever and in which we are told to grow is not in tongue speaking nor healing campaigns. Rather, the apostle says, faith, hope and charity (love) are the abiding graces. Such growth concerns itself with faith in the word of God, hope in his promises and love toward God and fellowman (Matt. 22:37-39). One understands, then, the reason Paul did not heal the young evangelist Timothy of his stomach disorder, but rather told him to medicate himself for the problem (I Timothy 5:23). Neither did God answer affirmatively Paul's prayer request for healing, but said to him: "*My grace is sufficient for thee*" (II Cor. 12:9).

5. *Water Baptism, unlike the baptism of the Holy Spirit which was only a promise to the apostles, is a present command for all believers (Mt. 28:18-20).*

Also, unlike the baptism of the Holy Spirit, its purpose is "for the remission of sins" (Acts 2:38, "unto the remission of sins" RSV).

It was the means by which a penitent, confessed, believer entered "into Christ" making it possible for God to add him to Christ's church (Rom. 6:3-4; Gal 3:26ff; Acts 2:41).

Now, for two thousand years, all first century apostolic doctrine has been confirmed. Near the close of the New Testament Jude proclaimed "the faith" to be "once for all delivered to the saints"

—(Jude 3, RSV).

References

1. Malachi 4:4-6
2. Isaiah 40:3; Matthew 3
3. Deuteronomy 18:18-19
4. Malachi 3:4
5. Matthew 3:4
6. Matthew 11:7-15
7. Robert G. Lee, *Christ Above All* (Grand Rapids Mich.: Zondervan Publishing House, 1974), p.3
8. Exodus 34:29ff.
9. Acts 10:33
10. Matthew 3:5-6
11. Joshua 24:15
12. Ephesians 4:14
13. Matt. 6:5-8
14. Amos 3:8
15. Matthew 3:7
16. Matthew 14:14
17. Luke 3:19; Matthew 14:1-10
18. I Pet. 5:8
19. I Sam. 18:7
20. John 1:19-23
21. John 3:30
22. John 3:25-26
23. William Barclay, *The Gospel of John* (Phila.: The Westminster Press, 1956) p. 133
24. John 3:9
25. See also II Cor. 6:14-18
26. Revelation 1:5
27. See Matthew 11:11
28. Romans 16:16; Acts 11:26; I Pet. 4:16
29. Acts 4:12
30. John 17:21-22; I Corinthians 1:10; Colossians 1:18
31. *The Life and Works of Flavius Josephus,* Trans, by Wm. Whiston (New York: Holt, Rinehart and Whiston, n.d.) pp. 387; 531
32. F. F. Bruce, *Second Thoughts on the Dead Sea Scrolls* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Wm. B. Eerdman's, 1964) p. 143
33. Mark 1:4; cf. Matthew 3:1 ff.
34. Matthew 3:15
35. Matthew 3:16-17
36. I Timothy 2:5; Hebrews 12:24
37. Matthew 28:19-20
38. Hebrews 9:16-17
39. Matthew 23:1
40. II Timothy 2:15
41. Genesis 2, 3
42. Luke 22:43

References, cont'd.

43. Hebrews 9:16-17
44. Jeremiah 31:31; Joel 2; Acts 2
45. Matthew 20:22
46. Acts 2
47. Acts 1:4-8
48. John 14:12-14
49. Revelation 21:8
50. Matthew 25:46
51. The command was not for the thief on the cross (Lu. 23:43) nor Lazarus (Lu. 16:19ff) for they lived before the command was given
52. Ananias was preaching under the Great Commission. See Matthew 28:19-20
53. Rom. 5:8-9; cf. Acts 22:16; Rev. 1:5
54. Rom.6:3-4
55. Jno. 19:34; cf. I Jno. 5:6
56. Acts 22:16
57. Acts 2;47
58. Eph. 4:5
59. Acts 2;38
60. Acts 10:44; 48
61. Joel 2;28
62. Acts 2 & 10
63. Eph. 1;9-10
64. Gen. 2:1; Gal. 3:26ff.

Supplementary Readings

Archer, Jr. Gleason L. *A Survey of Old Testament Introduction* (Chicago: Moody Press, 1974) pp. 37-53
Fox's Book of Martyrs, ed. by William Byron Forbush (Philadelphia: Universal Book & Bible House, 1926)
Russell, D. S. *The Jews from Alexander to Herod* (Oxford: New Clarendon Press, 1982) See index: Dead Sea Scrolls.
Spurgeon, Charles H. *Men of the New Testament* ed. by Dr. Chas. T. Cook (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Zondervan Publishing House) pp. 17-19

Questions for Chapter Four

1. Fully identify the following:
   a. John the Baptist
   b. The Essenes, Sadducees and Pharisees
   c. The Wilderness of Judea
   d. Six baptisms mentioned in the Bible.
2. What was the purpose for miracles and signs as given in Mark 16:18ff.?
3. What was the purpose of water baptism?
4. What are the spiritual implications when receiving water baptism?
5. Contrast John the Baptist's baptism with that of the Great Commission.
6. What are the similarities between these two baptisms?
7. Research the Essenes? What are differences between John the Baptist and this Jewish sect.

Outline for Chapter Five

The Wilderness Temptation

I. On Holy Ground
   A. Jesus at the crossroads of decision
   B. The aggressiveness of the Spirit
      1. The Spirit's calls are seldom easy assignments
      2. Hidden blessings in the wilderness

II. The Temptation: The War of the Gods
   A. The perfect combination to defeat Satan
   B. The Temptation from Satan's point of view
      1. Satan's argument concerning man's fondness for idolatry
      2. Satan's scorn for Jehovah

III. The First Wilderness Temptation: Position Without Privilege is Nothing
   A. Five stunning blows
      1. Satan's request seemed absolutely legitimate
      2. The request had an apparent scriptural precedent
      3. The world will laugh at you if you make foolish claims
      4. To deny Satan's request made God appear unreasonable and unfair
      5. No one need ever know what you do privately
   B. Jesus' method of overcoming Satan

IV. The Second Wilderness Temptation: Position Without Prestige is Nothing
   A. Satan lures Jesus to seek the applause of the world
   B. Satan sets one scripture against another
   C. Satan also challenges reliable rules of hermeneutics
   D. Revivals promoted as "healing campaigns" provide sensational attractions

V. The Third Wilderness Temptation: Position Without Power is Nothing
   A. Was it possible for Jesus to sin?
   B. Finding the right path
   C. Seven ways to help find the right course

VI. Eleven Point Summary of the Temptations
   A. Satan mocks Jesus' claims
   B. Satan's Achilles heel

OT BY BREAD ALONE!

Chapter Five

The Wilderness Temptation

Matthew 4:1-11; Mark 1:12-13; Luke 4:1-13

Fasting in the desert,
Tell of the days that are past,
How for our sins he was tempted,
Yet triumphant at last.
Tell of the years of his labor,
Tell of the sorrows he bore,
He was despised and afflicted,
Homeless rejected and poor.
Tell of the story most precious,
Sweetest that ever was heard.
—Fanny J. Crosby

1. ON HOLY GROUND

When Moses drew near the burning bush in a wilderness where he was tending sheep, God warned him to take off his shoes for he was about to tread on holy ground. One should share similar feelings when treading the wilderness temptation with Jesus. Jesus was about thirty years old at the wilderness temptation. His temptation did not begin or end in the wilderness affliction. In his young manhood he must have been subject to normal temptations. At the conclusion of the wilderness ordeal it is said that Satan left him for "a little season." It must have been a difficult trial indeed when he returned in the personality of a good friend (Matt. 16:23). But the wilderness temptations were awesome experiences in the life of our Lord, so we approach this subject with quiet reverence realizing we too are treading on holy ground. Along with Gethsemane and Calvary the temptation period marks one of three withering trials in Jesus' ministry. Concerning this dreadful period that spanned forty weary days of "fasting alone in the desert," Henry Burton has written these descriptive and appropriate words:

The subject of our Lord's temptation is mysterious, and therefore difficult. Lying in part within the domain of human consciousness and experience, it stretches far beyond sight, throwing its dark projections into the realms of the spirit, that realm, 'dusk with horrid shade,' which Revelation itself has not illumined, save by occasional lines of light, thrown into, rather than across it. We cannot, perhaps hope to have a perfect understanding of it, for in a subject so wide and deep there is room for many hypotheses; but inspiration would not have recorded the event so minutely had it not a direct bearing upon the whole of the Divine Life, and were it not full of fertile lessons for all time. To Him who suffered within it, it was a wilderness indeed; but to us 'the wilderness and the solitary place have become glad, and the desert . . . blossoms as the rose.' Let us, then, seek the wilderness reverently yet hopefully, and in doing so let us carry in our minds these two guiding thoughts—they will prove a silken thread for the labyrinth—first, that Jesus was tempted as Man; and second, that Jesus was tempted as the Son of Man.[1]

Following the baptism of Jesus and the divine declaration of his Sonship, Jesus was led by the Spirit into a "solitary place" to make the greatest decision of his earthly life. This moment was of staggering importance because the entire future of the whole world hung teetering in the balance.

A. Jesus at the Crossroads of Decision

Confronting Jesus at this moment of destiny was this tremendous enigma: should he continue to pursue the redemptive course he had left heaven to do? Or should he spare himself embarrassment and agony by forsaking the path that led inevitably to the brow of Calvary?

One cannot imagine the terror and loneliness of this agonizing decision from which there was no escape. Great decisions are always exacting and crucial in such contemplative, solemn moments. Who would not gladly flee such draining trials if possible? However, the evident course of righteousness that separates brave souls from the timid is often preceded by a distressing bridge of sorrow that absolutely must be spanned.

Such perplexing situations drive one into solitary meditations seeking answers to perplexing dilemmas. Because Jesus underwent such agonizing decisions solely out of love for the human race in far greater depth than we shall ever realize, both sympathy and gratitude are magnified in a believer's heart. Jesus is driven into the wilderness to do battle with Satan, a place where he will have a quiet place apart to reflect upon the mission that ominously, yet hopefully, lay before him.

This was all part of the divine plan. As man's redeemer, Jesus was to be tempted in the same manner the parents of the human race were tempted when they fell, taking all posterity with them. This time the last Adam must not fail if the human race is to survive.

For we have not an high priest which cannot be touched with the feeling of our infirmities, but was in all points tempted like as we are, yet without sin.

Heb. 4:15

B. The aggressiveness of the Spirit

Some believe the Spirit sought out Satan. It seems Jesus was seeking a solitary place to think his way through—to plan his method for beginning his ministry. Later, the great missionary Paul responded to a similar hour of decision when he withdrew into Arabia shortly after his conversion. So, immediately after Jesus' baptism the Spirit led him into the wilderness. Here, alone in the quiet, Satan comes to Jesus and the battle rages for the souls of men—yours and mine!

Commitment to the cause of heaven inevitably drives one into a wilderness of rigid discipline. Baptism *into Christ* never ushers one into a comfortable, safe religion, which isolates itself inside beautiful houses of worship insulated from the world's problems. God's true soldiers are made hard as nails by overcoming daily temptations. These tough battles fortify them against forces seeking to rob them of their righteousness in Christ. Worshipping in faith, the child of God goes from the church assembly braced to face the wilderness of life where the cruelties of discouragement rush down in full fury upon his head.

Here, in this daily wilderness, the harshest battles of life are fought leaving one drained of spiritual energy and asking if all is worth the struggle—sometimes, even life itself. It is here that hungry and thirsty souls are driven in desperation to commit acts felt as necessary for surviving in Satan's jungle of blinding deceptiveness.

In the maze of Satan's entrapments, the blackest evils persist. Those groping, hurting souls lost in despair and anguish must be given a chance to see the light of the Gospel reflected in the true soldiers of Christ. For a church to entertain itself with a self-centered program, while contented to sit upon comfortable padded pews, blandly nursing a program geared to reach its own social strata—*is blasphemy.* The church is not to abide in comfort while ignoring the Spirit's call to the wilderness where the cosmic battles of eternity are raging.

1. The Spirit's calls are seldom easy assignments.

Too many have a conception of church life as "playing and paying" rather than "toiling and troubling." Righteous living demands rigid discipline which often means suffering for your faith. It is astonishing that the very first assignment Jesus gave his apostles was in the city where only a few weeks before he had been murdered. If he had just asked them they could have found a much safer place to preach their first sermons of the New Age. Jerusalem? Surely not the center of injustice that had killed the prophets of old and more recently Jesus! What chance did the new Gospel have where only two months before they had crucified its leader? In this city, the Temple of God had become "a den of thieves." It was corrupted by covetous priests charging exorbitant prices for their pre-approved sacrifices.[2] The assignment to preach salvation in the Temple area, now a wilderness of covetousness and unbelief, must have been extremely disturbing. To the disciples, the stakes were high but so was the opportunity!

2. Hidden blessings in the wilderness.

Struggles in life's bleak wilderness never appear to be blessings. But, as Hagar of old discovered, great blessings can be very near when one suffers alone. Think also of Joseph in an Egyptian prison suffering for a crime he did not commit. Yet, he rose from these circumstances to the governorship of Egypt.

The Son of man was led into the wilderness of Judea to do battle with the devil. Satan had invaded Eden millenniums before, stealing God's most precious jewels. Later, God desired to separate to himself a nation through which he could bring Christ into the world (Ex. 19). This was the purpose of Abraham's calling and the divine promise to bless all nations of the earth through his seed.

After freeing Abraham's descendants from Egyptian slavery by mighty wonders at the hand of Moses, God led them directly into the wilderness to test their endurance. They needed hardening to deepen their faith and equip them for the stringencies that lay ahead in capturing the promise land from the Canaanites. When twelve spies were sent into the land all but two, Joshua and Caleb, brought back a faithless report denying that they could take the land regardless of God's promise.[3] For this they were confined to the wilderness for forty long arduous years for hardening—a year for each day the spies spent spying out the land (Num. 13).

Except for the two who believed God, all those who left Egypt perished during the forty year trial period. Even so today, preparation for heaven includes a positive response to the Bible, the word of the Spirit, regardless of where it leads (See Jno. 3:8; Rom. 8:14-17). One must by faith be prepared to endure the discipline of God.[4] God's love builds a strong faith through discipline enabling the soul to resist the devil. Sometimes sufficient faith to overcome Satan can only be realized by marching through a wilderness of trials. As with the Israelites, in many instances this brings murmuring, complaining and finally drop out. The Book of Hebrews strongly warns Christians about this. In the wilderness the Israelites were to learn to trust God for their very lives. Through faithful obedience to the covenant, God could provide all the essentials for life and happiness. He fed them manna from heaven when they were hungry and gave them water from rocks when they were thirsty. When the water was bitter, he sweetened it, when they needed direction, he provided a drifting cloud by day and a pillar of fire by night. They prospered when they believed and obeyed the commands of Moses as the voice of God's Spirit. Later, in Romans 8:14, Paul remarked: "*For as many as are led by the Spirit of God, they are the sons of God.*"

The Spirit led Christ Jesus into the wilderness to equip him with the discipline needed in his forthcoming public ministry. Oblivious to it all, the world made love, war, and carried on business as usual as its fate hung precariously in the balance. Quite unrecognized by the masses, great spiritual battles are still being waged affecting the lives of all.

11. THE TEMPTATION: THE WAR OF THE GODS

In the texts under consideration in the heading of this chapter, Jesus, as incarnate God in the role of the messianic Son of Man, has invaded the world to regain the souls the Prince of Darkness has claimed. His intentions are to overthrow the Prince of Evil who has stolen all God's creatures by seducing them with lies. He is ready to establish the kingdom of heaven upon truth where righteousness will reign. While limiting himself to the weakness of the flesh as the Son of Man, Jesus will prove that righteousness by faith can overcome the most awesome lusts of the flesh. The stage is set for this unique drama in the shadows and crags of the wilderness of Judea. The drama unfolds as the Spirit leads Jesus, truly God and truly Man, away to do battle with the archenemy of the universe. Regarding this ordeal of great conflict between Christ and Satan, G. Campbell Morgan writes:

> *A Divine plan was being wrought out. It did not—to use a common expression—"happen" that Jesus met Satan and was tried. Neither is it true to say that the devil arranged the temptation. Temptation here is in the Divine plan and purpose. Jesus went into the wilderness under the guid-*

ance of the Holy Spirit to find the devil. My own conviction is that if the devil could have escaped that day, he would have done so. It is a very popular idea that the enemy drove Christ into a corner and tempted him. But the whole divine story reveals that the facts are otherwise. God's perfect Man, led by the Spirit . . . passes down into the wilderness, and compels the adversary to stand out clear from all secondary causes, and enter into direct combat . . . the significance of the temptation may be seen by placing the whole facts in contrast with the temptation of Adam. The devil challenged the first man. The second Man challenged the devil. The devil ruined the first Adam, the last Adam spoiled the devil. The first Adam evolved the human race in his defeat. The last Adam included the human race in His victory. The last Adam stood as the head of the new race, and being victorious, lifted the race with him.[5]

According to Morgan, this is not the picture of the last Adam doing merely what the first Adam did, abiding passively in life and when temptation came, resisting it where the first Adam failed. The last Adam had not only to resist temptation for his own sake when it assailed him, but had to seek out the tempter, to defeat and punish him for the wrong he did to the human race.

A. The perfect combination to defeat Satan

Here in the wilderness Christ is about to do for man what man has been unable to do for himself. In God's infinite wisdom, he has put together the perfect combination to beat the devil—God in man. Though God alone could have done it easily enough, that would not have been an accurate representation of God's fleshly creatures and could provide a basis for an accusation of unfairness by Satan at the judgment. God in Christ is qualifying himself as a representative and mediator for man. This combination is expressed by Paul in these words: "*By grace are ye saved through faith.*"[6] God and man joined forces in Jesus to defeat the awesome power of evil that had wasted man since Eden. This was the winning combination that was never to be broken by man from his very beginning. However, once man divorced himself from his Creator, he found himself unable to maneuver back into any lasting peace, not even to mention eternal life. The sword of the Spirit was placed at the gate of the Garden of Eden to protect the gate of paradise from man's unlawful entry. Thus, no man could bypass the death penalty for sin or circumvent redemption by grace and truth in Christ. Sin cannot dwell in the presence of God. God's foreknowledge of man's sin and his need for atonement made the coming of Christ preordained. There has not been a single moment since man has sinned in which the grace of God was not available. Paul speaks of this, as follows:

According as he has chosen us in him before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and without blame before him in love: having predestined us unto the adoption of children by Jesus Christ to himself, according to the good pleasure of his will, to the praise of the glory of his grace, wherein he has made us accepted in the beloved. In whom we have redemption through his blood, even the forgiveness of sins, according to the riches of his grace; wherein he hath abounded toward us in all wisdom and prudence . . . (Eph. 1:4-8)

Under God's grace provided in his Son which ushered in the Gospel age, the sword of the Spirit (the truth in Christ) still guards the entrance to the tree of life (Heb. 4:12).

Those who would enter to eat its fruit must be slain by the sword of God, which is the word of Truth, and be resurrected to the new life of truth in Jesus. Paul describes this action of the regeneration process as follows:

> *Know ye not, that so many of us as were baptized into Jesus Christ were baptized into his death? Therefore we are buried with him by baptism into death: that like as Christ was raised up from the dead by the glory of the Father, even so we also should walk in newness of life. For if we have been planted together in the likeness of his death, we shall also be in the likeness of his resurrection: knowing this, that our old man is crucified with him, that the body of sin might be destroyed, that henceforth we should not serve sin. For he that is dead is freed from sin.*
>
> *(Rom. 6:3-7)*

God alone provides absolute efficiency for all of man's deficiencies. Jesus is the only hope for man to reestablish himself with his Creator. Jesus' earthly life was devoted to this project and the wilderness temptation is an early mile on the long road to man's redemption which he must travel. The stakes are extremely high in this unparalleled contest between the two great powers of the spiritual world. At this moment all other conflicts grow insignificant and pale because the stakes were high—winner take all. Every living soul was represented at this affair and on its outcome depended everyone's eternal existence. Although tested many times, it was here in the wilderness, and at the resurrection, that it was finally determined God was really able to deliver on his Edenic promise to bruise the serpent's head by the woman's seed (Gen.3:15).

From a fleshly point of view, Satan knew that the fight was heavily tipped in his favor. The odds makers in Las Vegas would have been heavily for the Devil. As always, he bound no restraining rules upon himself as Jesus did, and had no guidelines to follow as did Jesus. He was free to try his best shots in the most evil and despicable ways possible. Christ rigidly bound himself to fight as a true righteous representative of man *within the limits and weaknesses of the flesh.* The glory of the final overthrow of God for the rule of the universe was too much for Satan's pride. There was black evil in Satan's design to cleverly wait forty days while Jesus was without food. Satan desired to begin the struggle on his own terms that he might catch Jesus at his very weakest moment and then unarm him by appealing to his highly inflamed appetites. If God was ever to be overcome, the hour was ripe right there in the wilderness of the Judean hills.

B. The temptation from Satan's point of view

The word Satan means adversary—to accuse. How well he enjoys presenting his case, that God's word is unfair, and absolutely impossible for man to abide. Swaggering as a cocky overconfident attorney, and with man seated in the jury panel, Satan hurls his opening cynical argument against God. The tempter proceeds to accuse God of the lowliest meanness: *giving man a spiritual law which God knew full well he could never keep given the fleshly appetites God had placed within him.* Satan's basic premise seems to be that man's fleshly appetite always outweighs his hunger for Spiritual bread. Beginning with the Edenic couple, he provides classic ex-

The Devil's Dimensions

1. A big head
2. A narrow mind
3. A low heart
4. A forked tongue
5. A tight fist

amples. Although created in the image of God, Satan posits, the first couple freely chose to abandon God's law for a wisdom he had purposefully denied them. After introducing Adam and Eve as incriminating evidence against God, Satan powerfully points to the refusal of every single soul since Eden as having joined forces with their grandparents in a rebellion against God's word. Satan says that it is evident everyone had rather serve the flesh than God. He offers the entire fallen human race as proof.

This is Satan's assessment of the situation. He presents a blanket indictment against Jehovah's demand for man to obey his word. Satan offers as prima facie evidence the complete fall of God's creation. This proves, he thinks, God's law of righteousness to be totally unfair because his own human creature has unanimously rejected it as undesirable and impossible to keep.

If God is as loving and as just as he claims to be, Satan smirks, and his law infallible, *why has there never been at least one single honest soul in history able to keep it?** The dilemma is crystal clear in his cunning mind: God either gave a law too difficult for man to keep, or he made man's appetites for the flesh stronger than his desires for the Spirit. In either instance Satan accuses God of being wholly at fault—either he does not understand his own creature, or, if he does understands man's problems, he is grossly unfair in demanding of man what is impossible to perform. Being totally at fault, God is no more than a divine tyrant with selfish, burdensome and unreasonable demands.

If God is omniscient, Satan continues to accuse, then he must have known beforehand that the human race would be trapped into a helpless, pitiful situation.* Likewise, Jehovah must have known misery and suffering would follow the human race throughout the centuries. The Accuser appeals to the human jury that every passion within them has been placed there by God.

1. Satan's argument concerning man's fondness for idolatry.

Man has not only rejected Jehovah but continually fashions sundry gods to suit himself, Satan continues. In spite of Jehovah's selfish first command: "*Thou shalt have no other gods before me,*"[7] man worships just about anything and everything but God. Why? Satan mocks. Why does God's man persist in bowing to false deities if there was any great fulfilling comfort for his soul in worshipping Jehovah? By rejecting his Creator, man has done the only intelligent thing for him to do. In his great desire to be worshipped, Jehovah created a free moral being for that purpose who totally rejected him for idols

Can you say this with Paul: *"for necessity is laid upon me; yea, woe is unto me, if I preach not the gospel!"* —*1 Cor. 9:16*

**** "If" is emphasized in the above context of Satan's views because it is his favorite lingual instrument of temptation. He persistently used the word in conversation with Jesus in the wilderness temptation. Note that he used the term in each instance: "If thou be the Son of God," was used in the first two temptations and "if thou wilt fall down and worship me", in the third.***
— See Matthew 4:3, 6, and 9

2. Satan's Scorn for Jehovah.

The very idea, Satan continues to scorn. Jehovah placed a man in a garden of fruit trees, put before his innocent eyes a beautiful tantalizing fruit, then, of all things, demanded on penalty of death that he not touch or taste it.

How cruel Satan makes God appear. According to this fallen angel, Jehovah simply wanted the Edenic couple to remain babes forever. There was a moral obligation to point out this unfairness to Eve—*so*, he felt compelled to do it by demonstrating the harmlessness of the forbidden tree by eating its fruit himself right before Eve's eyes. This proved his superior knowledge and that God had lied about the fruit being poisonous. Quite the contrary, Satan disputed, it was truly a health food that made one wise.

The plausibility and evidence were overpowering. There was Satan munching away at the forbidden fruit, yet healthy and wise. Notice the text:

> *And when the woman saw that the tree was good for food, and that it was pleasant to the eyes, and a tree desired to make one wise, she took of the fruit thereof, and did eat, and gave also unto her husband with her; and he did eat. (Gen. 3:6)*

Eve *saw* that the fruit was "good for food." By such preponderant evidence it seemed God had purposefully deceived the first couple. So our grandparents fell for the Accuser's trap to destroy the most precious possession God had for himself. But, one must not be too harsh on our early relatives, for had anyone else been there, they also would have succumbed to Satan's deceitful temptation. By their sin, Adam and Eve made it necessary for God to redeem the human race—*loving us to his own incarnate death, providing grace all sufficient for all.*

D. The ultimate temptation

By super craftiness Satan purposefully veils his true objective to bring about the overthrow of Jehovah. He makes his propositions appear entirely harmless, even indispensable to man's welfare and happiness. By ingenious subtlety he makes his motives appear extremely benevolent while hiding his selfish ambition and malignant jealousy against God.

By overcoming the three temptations, Jesus smashes the devil's camouflage and brings the devil's corrupt nature into open view. Any conception of Jehovah as less than perfect is inferior to the lofty conception of "*God.*" A true conception of deity conveys absolute perfection to prevent it from being a contradiction to the thought of "God," unless one wants to worship an inferior deity. Such a being may be a god, *but not God.*

God created a perfect man in the Garden of Eden. He placed within him a good and clean spirit in his own image, housing it within a *perfectly created body.* Had this not been true, God would have been the cause of sin, purposefully leaving defects with the intentions of causing man to fall. *Sin did not spring spontaneously from within the mind of man.* To sin never occurred to our early parents until after the thought was planted *from an outside source.* Making a bold point on this, G. Campbell Morgan writes:

As evil was present to the first man from without, so also was it to the second (Jesus) . . . Evil is not a natural product of God's humanity. It is not a process of evolution. To hold that, in the last analysis, is to make God the Author of sin. . . Revelation takes man no further back than the fall of the angels, which is declared and not explained. From this fall came the first movement of evil in human life, and the ruin of the human race. The Head of the new race goes back to the point of origin of the evil in man, and confronts personality (Satan), who is the head and front of the offending.[8]

The devil apparently was the loser in a rebellious uprising in heaven. He entered the picture in Eden to mock God, then proceeded to do so by demonstrating he could alienate God and his creature.[9] Satan's objective was to prove divine law impractical, overly protective, vastly immature, and completely incapable of providing happiness for man because it prevented him from maturing into an independent self-thinking adult. To be successful in enticing man to deliberately disobey his Creator would, in Satan's perverted thinking, vindicate himself in his accusations against God. Consequently, all creation in heaven and earth would have to judge Jehovah as a pitiful God who had miserably failed. What gloating! What a swelling of pride must have vibrated in Satan's bosom when he successfully alienated God's precious crowning act of creation. It remained for Calvary to eventually portray God's immeasurable love for man and expose the total reprobate mind of Satan.

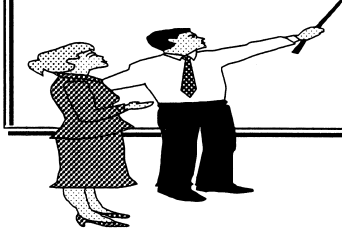
There is an old Gnostic doctrine that teaches that the flesh of man is totally evil. If this were true, God is ultimately to be blamed for the origin of evil because he created the body of man. This is totally unacceptable in the correct comprehension of the meaning of "Holy God." Satan's attempt to picture God as an adolescent deity given to peevish whims, breathing out curses of eternal damnation in a lake of fire upon everyone who might question his authority and refuses to worship him, serves to confirm his totally wicked personality.

In Matthew 13, Jesus said those who attributed the mercy and love of God to the demonic spirit of Beelzebub were guilty of such tremendous blasphemy against the Holy Spirit their sin could never be forgiven. Such sin sprang from a totally hardened heart—one willing to deny the obvious through stubbornness and selfish motives.

The goodness of God is said to lead men to repentance (Rom. 2:4). God always accepts the penitent soul who mourns his sin and aches to become righteous with God. Since those in Matthew 13 were insensitive to the only source which leads men to repentance—the goodness of God in Christ—they chose to make themselves forever *incapable of repentance.* This made their forgiveness impossible (Heb. 6).

Wherefore I say unto you, All manner of sin and blasphemy shall be forgiven men: but the blasphemy against the Holy Ghost shall not be forgiven unto men.

—Matt. 12:31



III. THE FIRST WILDERNESS TEMPTATION: POSITION WITHOUT PRIVILEGE IS NOTHING

This is the first biblical account of an encounter between the Prince of Light and the Prince of Darkness. One can visualize Satan observing Jesus from a distance in the wilderness. Like a circling vulture, he waits for Jesus' weakest moment before striking. Eventually the moment comes as intense hunger pains began to gnaw at Jesus. Satan may have observed Jesus gazing at the smooth, round brown stones scattered about him on the ground. To an extremely hungry person they just might look much like small loaves of bread straight from the oven. The agony of hunger, coupled with the power to change the stones to bread, presented an extremely dangerous situation. The arch enemy of mankind saw his opportunity and like a coiled viper struck, spewing forth these poisoned words: "*If thou be the Son of God, command this stone that it be made bread.*"[10]

The first temptation was to entice Jesus to abuse his power of the Holy Spirit for personal gratification. He again tried unsuccessfully the same approach with Peter.[11]

After Jesus' baptism in Jordan, the anointing of the Holy Spirit came upon him, equipping him with the divine power for his earthly mission. It is not to be thought that Jesus had such power when he was a child in Nazareth as some pseudepigraphical writings assert. Jesus did display amazing knowledge and wisdom at the age of twelve when he was found discussing the law with the doctors at the Temple, but this incident is no reason for concluding Jesus had supernatural powers at this time.[12]

Prior to our Lord's receiving the Spirit's power to perform miracles, Satan had no reason to tempt Jesus in the manner he is now tempting him. The deceiver came quickly after Jesus received power at the confirmation of the Holy Spirit at his baptism. With such power, Jesus is tested to determine if he has sufficient strength to refrain from using these spiritual powers to serve the desires of the flesh. Forty days elapse before Jesus is tried. Satan waited until he thought the desire of hunger was beyond control. If Jesus overcomes at this point, he will have demonstrated his discipline to resist using the Holy Spirit's power for personal gratification.

So Satan waited until just the right moment to hit Jesus with an onerous blow—one that would have crippled any ordinary person. This foul play stunned Jesus in at least five ways. What are they? First notice Satan's request and then consider the five points that follow:

The Request:

> "*And when the tempter came to him, he said, If thou be the Son of God, command that these stones be made bread*" *(Matt. 4:3).*

A. Five stunning blows

Satans' request seemed absolutely legitimate.

Satan's suggestion that Jesus turn the stones to bread is a clever perversion of Jesus' newly acquired powers. It had the hard selling point of legitimacy. If Jesus was truly the Son of God as the Holy Spirit had testified a little

over a month ago at his baptism, then surely all things were his and for his sake. Paul declared later in Colossians 2:16-17:

> *For by him were all things created, that are in heaven, and that are in earth, visible and invisible, whether they be thrones, or dominions, or principalities, or powers: all things were created by him, and for him: and he is before all things, and by him all things consist* (Col. 1:16-17).

Was it not the Father who had placed Jesus in a human body and gave him appetites that must be fulfilled? Then it would be a legitimate act of godliness to care for his health and to protect his body. Besides this, Jesus had created this craving hunger by fasting and praying to God. Surely, Satan would press, a good Father would want his Son to maintain his physical strength. If Jesus turned these stones to bread, it would only be a high act of benevolence in caring for his God-given body. Surely no better use could he make of his God-given powers than this.

The request seemed to have an apparent scriptural precedent.

The temptation was made extremely more difficult to resist in that it seemed to have a scriptural precedent. When the Israelites were famished on their tiring journey in the wilderness, *God fed them by a miracle.* He had commanded Moses to speak to a rock which brought forth water to supply all their needs.[13] Surely, Satan could have smirked, God did not think more of those murmuring rebels in the wilderness who challenged the leadership of Moses than he did Jesus—*if he truly was the Son of God.* Also, God had provided manna for those people by direct intervention.[14]

The severe sting lurking in Satan's first proposition was this: Jesus, with whom God supposedly was well pleased, was really less loved than those insufferable complaining sinners in the wilderness of the Sinai peninsula. No ordinary human could have withstood this tremendous temptation containing both the ring of legitimacy and what appeared to be a sound scriptural precedent.

The world will laugh at you if you make foolish claims.

"The world will laugh at you, Jesus, if you claim to have divine power and you fail the first time you try to use it," Satan seems to suggest. The first temptation suggested a way for Jesus to secretly test the power of the Holy Spirit. In this way he could reconfirm privately that it was God who spoke to him at Jordan. After all, six weeks had elapsed since he had heard—*or thought he heard*—a voice confirming his mission. Had he really heard the voice correctly? Or was it a voice at all? Perhaps he had heard something else, perhaps the rustling leaves? What would be so wrong with a little private test just to make certain the voice was legitimate and that he now possessed the power of the Holy Spirit without measure? If a failure, this secret test would prevent Jesus from appearing foolish at a later public display if he failed. One can almost hear Satan taunting: "*Before you make a fool of yourself, try it out here where no one will ever know. If you fail, it will never be known and you can live the rest of your days out quietly among the people at Nazareth without ridicule.*"

To deny Satan's request made God appear unreasonable and unfair.

In the wake of Satan's perverted reasoning, it would appear Jehovah had been extremely unkind and unfair. A feeling that one has been treated unfairly is nearly always devastating. It will cause one to compromise when all else has failed to move him. The renown author, C. S. Lewis, points out that there is something down deep within us that always demands fair play. From early childhood we feel it is extremely rude when someone takes unfair advantage of us. It is quite common to hear children criticizing their playmates, saying: "*That's not fair!*" From early childhood we feel a keen sense of foul play when we believe we have been cheated. Well aware of this inward emotion of man's, Satan planned his first approach along this avenue. This, he thought, would certainly cause the Lord to act in his own defense.

No one need ever know what you do privately.

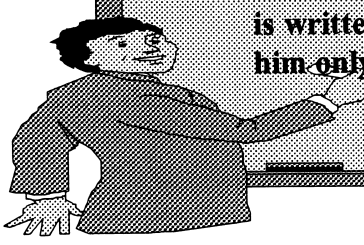
No one need ever know or get hurt. Countless numbers have succumbed to this rationalization. Of course, if Jesus had fallen for this possible suggestion of Satan's, he would have forfeited his mission and the entire human race would have been eternally lost. No one has sufficient wisdom to be sure a private sin will never be known, nor that anyone will ever be hurt from it. "*Be sure your sin will find you out*" (Nu. 32:23).

David thought he had sinned privately with Bathsheba. Later, he penitently sang to God: "*Against thee and thee only have I sinned*" (Psa. 51). David hurt himself as well as Bathsheba and Uriah. He also hurt the soldiers who were slain in the foolish battle staged to kill Uriah. All Israel was hurt from this private affair, but the one David knew he hurt most of all was God.

Who knows the full extent of sin's damaging effect upon one's soul? To claim "No one will ever be hurt," is to assume for oneself omnipotence.

Jesus burned under the fire of the first temptation. Alfred Edersheim remarks:

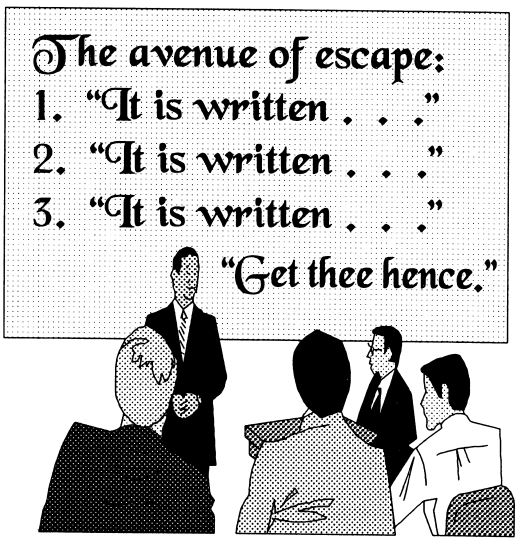
> *He must, he will absolutely submit to the will of God. But can this be the will of God? One word of power and the scene would have changed. Let Him despair of all men, of everything—He can do it. . . He can do miracles—put an end to present want and question, and as visibly the possessor of absolute miraculous power, the goal is reached! But this really would have been to change the idea of the Old Testament miracle into the heathen conception of magic, which was absolute power inherent in an individual, without moral purpose. The moral purpose—the grand moral purpose in all that was God—was an absolute submission to the will of God. His Spirit had driven him into that wilderness. His circumstances were God*



Then saith Jesus unto him, Get thee hence, Satan: for it is written, Thou shalt worship the Lord thy God, and him only shalt thou serve. Then the devil leaveth him, and, behold, angels came and ministered unto him. —Matt. 4:10-11

appointed; and where he so appoints them, He will so support us in them, even as the failure of bread, He supported by Manna. And Jesus absolutely submitted to that will of God by continuing His present circumstance. To have set Himself free from what they implied, would have been despair of God, and rebellion. He does more than not succumb—He conquers.[15]

B. Jesus' method of overcoming temptation



Jesus overcame the first temptation by choosing the imperishable bread over perishable bread. He rebuked the Jews in John 6, telling them not to labor for the bread that perishes but for the bread that nourishes one's soul unto eternal life. However, they preferred fleshly bread over the true Bread of Life.

Here, in the wilderness of the temptation, burdened with intense physical desire, Jesus was able to overcome Satan by remaining within God's sphere of safety—his eternal word. Faithful obedience to God's word provides a hedge of security. Jesus was the embodied word, his body being the Temple of the Holy Spirit. Satan has no power to force entry into the Temple of God. Jesus' sole use of the word of God as his defense offers a perfect example to overcome all temptations of life. This was his impervious armor: "*Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that proceedeth out of the mouth of God.*"[16] The word, the bread of God, nourishes the believer unto eternal life. Physical appetites are given for happiness but must be disciplined or they will become destructive by making us quench the spirit.

Jesus is known as "the man for others." His purpose for coming to earth was to save the human race (Matt. 1:21). He received unlimited power to convince as many as possible of his divine Sonship. He chose, however, to suffer the rigors of intense self discipline rather than use his power for personal gratification.

A great lesson may be observed in Jesus' use of the word "man" in his reply to Satan: "*Man,*" he said, "shall not live by bread alone." In Jesus, God was on earth to function wholly within the limitations of *man.* His incarnation was to gain victory over Satan as a man, for man and not to defeat him as God. He could have destroyed Satan with a word without coming to earth, but Jesus came to qualify himself as a "fit mediator between God and Man." The writer of Hebrews said:

Though he were a Son, yet learned he obedience by the things which he suffered; and being made perfect, he became the author of eternal salvation unto all them that obey him.
(Heb. 5:8-9)

Jesus proved that the spirit, even when confined in the weakness of the flesh, can be victorious over Satan when man insists on abiding within the Word.

All praise to our wonderful God's love, Jesus was victorious in the first temptation. By the word he overcame *the lust of the flesh.*

IV. THE SECOND WILDERNESS TEMPTATION: POSITION WITHOUT PRESTIGE IS NOTHING

There is a difference in the order of the last two temptations as recorded by Matthew and Luke. Mark mentions that Jesus was tempted but does not reveal any of the particulars about the event. According to Matthew, Satan's proposal for Jesus to leap from the pinnacle of the Temple was the second temptation, not the third. This is the order for our present discussion.

In the second temptation, once again the devil attempts to plant doubt in Jesus' mind regarding his divine Sonship. In this attack, according to William Barclay, Satan is suggesting Jesus seek the applause or glory of man—to play the grandstand. To some men, personal fame is preferred over food. Some will sin publicly for glory more readily than steal food secretly.

There are some sins man would like to hide, while there are others that spring forth from his pride. The nature of pride is that it demands an admiring audience. What better place is there than at public worship for a preacher to magnificently display his God given talents? So, here at the Temple worship, Satan thinks Jesus just might yield to a demonstration of using his power for personal glory.

A. Satan lures Jesus to seek the applause of the crowd

Jesus could have a great beginning by winning sudden and tremendous acclaim from those at worship services. "Here is the way to attract a large crowd to hear you preach," we can almost hear Satan whisper. "Begin big and they will come from everywhere just to see and admire you." Jesus must have looked down at the dive he would take from the lofty pinnacle. The thought of his fall to certain harm should bring intervention by angels to bear him up at the last moment just before he touched the pavement below squarely in the midst of those preparing the sacrifices for the day. Just think of the attention it would bring to have the angels appear at the last split second just before crashing himself upon the altar. Everyone would surely know he was the Messiah by such a demonstration. What an attraction and following that would make! No prophet before him had ever performed a miracle of such attraction.

This would be greater than anything Caesar had ever staged in Rome at the Colosseum. Perhaps he might be invited there! His fame would then spread quickly far and wide. People would come from everywhere to see Jesus' spectacular displays.

B. Satan sets one scripture against another

Satan is adept at the misuse of Scripture, so again he appeals to them. Many pious souls are very gullible—just make anything appear scriptural and they will go for it. Perhaps even the Son of God will fall for a clever twist of the holy word. So, the second temptation, just as the first, was made to appear very very scriptural.

Jesus quickly brought Satan's guile to light by demonstrating that the devil's application of Psalms 91:11-12 contradicted Deuteronomy 6:16 which declares: "*Thou shalt not tempt the Lord thy God.*" Any interpretation of Scripture that causes one verse to violate the obvious teaching of another passage cannot possibly be the correct application of the text. Satan knew this, and he knew Jesus knew it as well,

but he also knew that *pride causes people to sin even when they know the correct meaning of Scripture.*

C. Satan also challenges reliable rules of hermeneutics

Normally, one may not fall for such an obvious misuse of the Scripture, but when a person's pride is at stake, and often personal gain as well, correct rules for interpreting the Scripture are frequently flung to the wind. A Scripture that once seemed crystal clear can progressively dim in its meaning until the original meaning of the text can no longer be comprehended. (Note II Thess. 2:10-12).

The wilderness temptations reflect the disciple's great need for intense personal Bible study and prayer for a correct hermeneutics of Scripture. Bible classes are not daydreaming periods by sincere Bible students. Christians must be aware that, once the Christian life begins, Satan is lurking along the way eager to meet them in some woeful wilderness in a desperate gamble for their souls—a time when the odds will all be stacked in his favor. Doubt, misuse of mission and Scripture for personal profit and glory will be mercilessly hurled at one when this encounter arrives. Then, at the weakest moment, Satan dangles improper gain before one and makes serving one's lusts appear amazingly biblical. Satan is always ready to abuse the written Word, therefore the Christian must be on guard, to study scripture carefully, have an instant knowledge of it in times of emergencies and be willing to abide by its teaching at whatever the cost. If one does not heed Peter's admonition in the following scripture he will never be able to prevail against the wiles of the devil.

> *But sanctify the Lord God in your hearts; and be ready always to give an answer to every man that asketh you a reason for the hope that is in you with meekness and fear. . .* (I Pet. 3:15)

Jesus adamantly resisted giving a dramatic display of power to gather a crowd. This should cause some to think twice who feel they should parade their faith by mocking the laws of nature.

D. Revivals promoted as "healing campaigns" provide sensational attractions

In spite of the clear statement of Jesus that the sick need a physician (Matt. 9:12), some who suffer from serious illness are urged by "faith healers" to forgo medical attention, avowing that to seek such would be due to a weakness of faith. In a few remote areas of the southern states some have demonstrated their doctrinal faith by allowing poisonous snakes to slither over their bodies. An example is cited of Paul in Acts 28:3 as a proof text for such faith flashing. But to use this verse to support the reckless handling of poisonous snakes is to wrench it from its context. Here Paul did not test God, but touched a viper quite by accident while gathering wood for a fire. It bit him with no apparent harm. If Jesus had fallen from the pinnacle of the Temple by *accident*, according to the prophecy in Psalms, the angels would have protected him; but Jesus knew to jump intentionally would have been tempting God and a perversion of that Scripture.

Any interpretation of Scripture that causes it to violate the obvious teaching of another passage, cannot possibly be the correct application of the text.

Mark's Gospel says if a believer were to "*take up serpents; and if he drink any deadly thing, it will not hurt them,*" (Mk. 16:18) but the text no more authorizes the deliberate handling of snakes or drinking of poison than Psalms 91:12 authorized Jesus to jump from the pinnacle of the Temple. Neither would Paul have intentionally permitted a viper to bite him on his journey to Rome on the authority of this verse alone.[17] Such passages do not permit one to tempt God. They do mean this: no accidental affliction could have prevented the early believers from establishing the church of Christ. They do not mean one cannot end his life *at will* by poison, or any other means.

If Satan had succeeded in getting Jesus to jump, there would have been no glory as promised, but a prompt end to Jesus' life and mission. But Jesus refused to be lured away by bribery and misuse of the Scriptures and thus became victorious in the second temptation: *the pride of life.*

V. THE THIRD WILDERNESS TEMPTATION: POSITION WITHOUT POWER IS NOTHING

Having failed in the first two temptations, Satan became desperate. It was his last stand in this affair to bring about the fall of the Saviour and the doom of the human race. If he fails now, it means his own doom—forever. So he recklessly abandons all subterfuge and frankly propositions Jesus to worship him, promising him all the kingdoms of the earth if he would do so. To make the temptation as powerful as possible, Satan takes the Son of Man "*up into an exceeding high mountain*" where, in a great panoramic view, all nations are displayed before him. "All these nations," he promises Jesus, "are yours if you will just worship me."[18]

One cannot deny the awesome powers of demonic rulers. They have gained power by the sword and have lost it the same way. Had Jesus fallen for this final temptation he would have left the same terrible mark in history as all selfish despots—one totally opposite to his divine mission and from his present world image. Very likely he would never have been remembered at all.

A. Was it really possible for Jesus to sin?

If Jesus could not have fallen for these Satanic proposals as some have claimed, then the record of the temptations makes no sense at all. It would be redundancy in a Book whose authors were extremely selective of their material.[19] Jesus resists this third temptation just as he did the others by implementing the appropriate use of the word of God as his sole defense. Faith plus a good knowledge of the word is the greatest asset in dealing with temptation. This is a sufficient avenue of escape for all who are being hard pressed by Satan. Jesus made no long apologetic speech to the devil in which he gave his reasons for remaining loyal to God. *There is no time for this when one is under the scourging influence of hot temptation.* Flee! Try talking it out with the devil, take one single moment to dally with him and you will lose.

Remember Samson, the man who played with sin until sin finally played with him? Jesus gave an immediate terse reply from Deuteronomy 10:20 that let Satan know quickly his determined position: "*Get thee hence Satan: for it is written, thou shalt worship the Lord thy God, and him only shalt thou serve.*"[20] Satan cared nothing for theology. He loves argument. He departed only after our Lord stated his position clearly with conviction.

B. Finding the right path

But how can we always know the right course? Is the path always clear? Perhaps not to us

mortals, but let us always be honest with ourselves. For those who are honestly seeking a correct choice when the way ahead seems hazy, here are a few simple guidelines:

C. Seven ways to help find the right course

1. TALK OVER YOUR PROBLEM WITH A WISE CHRISTIAN WHOM YOU REGARD HIGHLY.

2. WHAT WOULD YOUR CHRISTIAN FRIENDS THINK OF IT?

3. ASK YOURSELF— YOUR BETTER SELF— WHAT YOU TRULY THINK OF IT.

4. WILL YOU BE ABLE TO LIVE WITH YOURSELF AFTERWARD?

5. WHY DOES IT TAKE SO LONG TO MAKE THE DECISION?

6. WHERE MIGHT IT LEAD IN THE FUTURE?

7. CAN YOU PRAY HONESTLY ABOUT THE MATTER?

After seriously pondering these things, *act quickly and decisively.* This is the only thing that will effect Satan's retreat. Finally, Satan perceiving Jesus to be wholly committed to remaining within the will of God and to the use of the Word as his sole authority, left him. Afterward, Matthew says, the *angels came to him and ministered to him.* This is the way to make the angels appear! It is not by some daring act in which God is tested, but by remaining loyal to the Word throughout all crises.

God provided the proper nourishment for Jesus in due time. Jesus' temptation experience is a tremendous lesson in patience while suffering. The strengthening angel will eventually come to all who persist in faith. Remember Jacob at Peniel wrestled with the Angel of the Lord, clinging desperately onto him throughout the entire night for a blessing. He won, but was maimed for life in the process (Gen. 32). It is better to gain the heavenly blessing maimed for life, than not at all. Endure! Hang on! "*Be thou faithful unto death.*" The disciple will know soon after death it was worth all the suffering and pain for righteousness in his life.

Once again, praise God, Jesus was victorious. This final wilderness battle won by Jesus was victory over *the lust of the eye.* About 60 years later, the Apostle John in one of his epistles refers to the three categories of sin: the lust of the flesh, the pride of life and the lust of the eye. Under these three headings, John says, can be listed every sin that can possibly be committed.[21]

Put on therefore, as the elect of God, holy and beloved, bowels of mercies, kindness, humbleness of mind, meekness, longsuffering; Forbearing one another, and forgiving one another, if any man have a quarrel against any: even as Christ forgave you, so also do ye. And above all these things put on charity, which is the bond of perfectness. (Col. 3:12-14)

V. ELEVEN POINT SUMMARY OF THE TEMPTATIONS

(1) *The Devil offers rewards for serving him.* They are pleasurable to the thought and seem advantageous, especially when one is alone, bored, and facing decisions that would lead to suffering for righteousness.

(2) *The Devil is very knowledgeable in Scripture.* He will quote it abundantly and wrest it to serve his purpose. His quotations are lifted from context, perverted, and set in opposition to other Scriptures in an effort to deceive the pious.

(3) *Satan will always come when you are at your weakest moment.* He seeks not just an edge, but an overwhelming advantage with all odds in his favor.

(4) *It is not a sin to be tempted.* Jesus was tempted in all points as we but remained without sin. He did not yield when Satan offered him all things if he would fall down and worship him.

(5) *The way to overcome sin is to trust in God's word.* Remember what Paul said in Romans 10:17: "*Faith cometh by hearing and hearing by the word of God.*" One of the first signs of drifting toward sin is chronic absence from Bible study and worship—the very places where Paul said faith can be made stronger. Make the word a hedge about you.

(6) *We must imitate Jesus in his suffering for righteousness.* Let us sincerely use him as our guide in overcoming sin by applying the same principles as he did when tempted.

(7) *Jesus could have fallen.* The temptations demonstrate that Jesus was aware that he possessed supernatural power from God and that he could have selfishly used it to serve his fleshly desires.

(8) *Evil can appear extremely benevolent at times.* Jesus' temptations demonstrate along with Eve's in Eden, that evil can be made to look astonishingly right, and that the child of God is perfectly justified by the Scriptures if he places fleshly desires over his calling. God may seem extremely unfair when we must deny ourselves something the flesh really wants. Study the Word and trust God. Pray for wisdom and you will come to know truly, by experience, that "*all things work together for the good of them that love God*" (Rom. 8:28).

(9) *Jesus qualified himself as man's mediator.* Jesus was tempted in all ways that man can be tempted. He thereby knows and understands man's severest trials. After Jesus' awful suffering Satan can never say effectively: "God does not know, care, or understand." But how is that possible if Jesus was never married or had children with all the agonies and heartaches that go with that? He knows because the church is his bride and its converts his children.

And what about being the executive of a great corporation with all the problems that go with that? Jesus is experienced in this also, for the church is the body of Christ and he is the Chief Executive (Eph. 1:22). The list could go on and on.

Although unique to himself, the melody of life Jesus played touched on all notes of life's musical scale. Anyone's melody of life, however different in composition from his, has had all notes touched upon by Jesus. Jesus knows the sound of every note in any human life.

(10) *The number "forty" is frequently associated in the Bible with great trial.* It rained "forty days and forty nights" during the great flood (Gen. 7:12); Moses tarried in the mount "forty days" during which the children of Israel became impatient and made for themselves graven images (Ex. 24); Israel wandered in the wilderness, enduring trials for "forty years" before entering the Promise Land (Nu. 14:33); and Elijah was in the wilderness for this period of time when he received his call from God (I Kgs. 19:8).

(11) *The true way of life is revealed.* In the very first temptation Jesus revealed the only true way of life for the man of faith when he said: "*Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word which proceedeth out of the mouth of God*" (Matt. 4:4).

A. Summarizing Satan's mockery of Jesus' claims

The temptations placed Jesus' claim of Sonship in a very demeaning light. Basically, the accusations hidden in Satan's attack on Jesus amount to the following:

1. Position without privilege is only patronizing.

According to Satan, Jesus' claim of divine Sonship meant absolutely nothing. If your Sonship cannot provide for your legitimate natural desires—desire that your own Father has given you—your position has no meaning as it holds no advantages for you. If God in such emergencies as your dire hunger, prevents use of divine power to sustain your health, then he has only mocked you by treating you as an orphan. *He has giving you Sonship without family privilege and love.*

2. Position without prestige is pathetic.

If you are who you say you are, Satan taunts, and you are prohibited from using your powers to attract a sizable following that will respect and glorify you, you should have remained wherever you were because here in the world you are a nobody—a zero! God is only indulging you with a title.

3. Position without power is pointless.

If you are the Son of God as you claim, then why die on the cross as a common criminal at the hands of these self-serving rulers? You say the priests have turned your alleged Father's house into a den of thieves. Which of the prophets have they not stoned? *Such people are not worth dying for. (In this he would be right.)* The only thing they will understand is power. Let me make you an earthly king with glory and they will worship you. Position is nothing if you do not have any authority to govern. Claim your divine Sonship if you must, but without power to enforce your will, the world will only laugh at you.

B. Satan's Achilles' heel

Although intensely crafty, Satan has an Achilles' heel in that he is blatantly ignorant of such things as grace, love, and mercy. He is totally depraved, therefore he has absolutely no conception of the ideas these words convey. As long as man has deeply buried within him the slightest vestige of the image of God in which he was created, regardless of how marred it might be, there is always a chance he can be wooed away from sin by the love of God and his own love for fellowman. The devil cannot conceive of this, so he keeps on trying to maneuver the human race into his death trap.

Satan has enticed the human race to sin through a lie and man has universally fallen, but there will always be a remnant willing to sacrifice everything for the durability of the Spirit over the fleeting lust of the flesh.

Satan's mission, therefore, is truly impossible although he does not seem to know it. If he does know it, he is aware of his destiny and in desperation he is only trying to take as many with him as he can.

Sin stripped of its tinsel and momentary glamour is extremely unintelligent. The kingdoms the devil offered Jesus were those he had captured by the same proposition he was offering Jesus. If he had given other potentates their power as he was now offering Jesus, he was at this moment selling them out. If he would do this to them, he would do precisely the same thing to Jesus after he had worshipped him.

Regardless of all this, the kingdoms were not truly his to give. He owned them only in the sense that he had deceived them into following him rather than God. Jesus had come to earth to salvage what Satan had wasted of God's creation. The Prince of Light had come to enter the strong man's house, to bind him and spoil his goods.[22] He had come to redeem sinners stolen by the subtlety of Satan's guile. How could the Owner of the house, whose family had been stolen by the alienation of affections under false pretenses, accept a gift from the thief who had stolen it from him at the beginning? (Matt. 12:29)

Furthermore, the kingdoms were not acceptable in their present state. They were now alienated from God, completely contaminated and damned by sin. The only way they could be returned was by a complete cleansing.

And there was only one cleansing agent that could wash away sin—the immaculate blood of the Son of God, the Lamb without spot or blemish. So our Lord Jesus, bless his holy name, went forward to the agonies of the cross to save all who would believe on him from the clutches and fate of Satan. It is like the apostle said: "*In whom we have redemption through his blood, even the forgiveness of sin*" (Ep. 1:7).[23]

References

1. Henry Burton. *The Gospel of Luke*, (London, Hodder & Stoughton, 1933; Expositors Series) p. 105.
2. John 2:16
3. Numbers 13; 14
4. Hebrews 12
5. G. Campbell Morgan. *The Crises of the Christ,* pp. 159-16. *Op. cit.* See page 65.
6. Ephesians 2:8-9
7. Exodus 20:3
8. G. Campbell Morgan. *The Crises of the Christ,* p. 158. *Op. cit.* See page 65.
9. II Peter 2:4
10. Luke 4:3
11. Acts 4:18-20.
12. Luke 2:49
13. Numbers 20:28
14. Exodus 16:15
15. Alfred Edersheim. *The Life and Times of Jesus the Messiah,* Vol. I., pp. 302-303, *Op. cit.* See page 27.
16. Matthew 4:4
17. Acts 28:2ff.
18. Matthew 4:9
19. John 20:30-31
20. Matthew 4:10

21. I John 2:16
22. Mark 3:27
23. See also I Jno. 1:7 and I Peter 1:18-19

SUPPLEMENTARY READINGS

Donehoo, James DeQ. *The Apocryphal and Legendary Luke of Christ* (New York: The Macmillian Co., 1903) p. 531
Lewis, C. S. *Mere Christianity* (New York: The Macmillian Company, 1958 Book III, Christian Behavior) p. 55
Robertson, A. T. *Epochs in the Life of Jesus* (New York: Charles Scriber & Sons, 1907) pp. x1; 192
Wuest, Kenneth L. *Word Studies in the New Testament,* Vol. I (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans Pub. Co., reprinted 1975) p. 25ff.

QUESTIONS FOR CHAPTER FIVE

A. Identify and/or explain the following:
   1. Accuser
   2. The sin that has no forgiveness
   3. The perfect combination to beat the devil
   4. Living by more than bread alone
   5. The sphere of security for the child of God
   6. Forcing God to prove himself
   7. The proper order of Matthew 5:16
   8. Three general categories of sin
   9. The possibility of Jesus sinning and failing in mission
   10. Satan's knowledge and use of God's Word

B. Discuss thoroughly:
   1. The temptations from Satan's point of view.
   2. With regard to the thrust of Satan's attack, underlying perversions, meaning, importance, the manner in which Christ successfully resisted Satan, and their relevance to man, discuss each of the three temptations.
   3. Review the items in the summary.

Outline for Chapter Six

The Early Months of Jesus' Ministry

I. John's Record of Jesus' Early Ministry.
   A. The thrust of John's Gospel
   B. John emphasizes eleven clear points
      1. Jesus is superior to the law and prophets
      2. Jesus is superior to John the Baptist
      3. The temple of the new age is far superior to the temple of the old system
      4. The new birth of the Spirit is superior to the old fleshly birth into Abraham's family
      5. The new place of worship is superior to the old location
      6. To feast upon Jesus' word, the bread of life, is superior to the manna that sustained Israel in the wilderness.
      7. Jesus, the sacrificial paschal Lamb of God, issuperior to the Passover lamb of the Old Testament.
      8. In the new kingdom of God, mercy is preferred over legalism.
      9. In Jesus, a superior light had come into the world to make men see the light of God.
      10. Jesus, as the Shepherd of God's sheep, is superior to the shepherds of Judaism.
      11. Jesus is superior because his word will judge all men.

II. The Earliest Disciples
   A. John urges his disciples to follow Jesus
   B. How John's disciples turned to Jesus
   C. Nathanael: his skepticism and conversion
   D. Jesus departs from Jordan with his first disciples
   E. The first miracle at Cana
   F. Summary
   G. Jesus Cleanses the Temple
   H. Acceptable sacrifice demands a clean Temple

III. The Interview with Nicodemus
   A. The new birth

Getting started

Chapter Six

The Early Months of Jesus' Ministry

John 1-3; Mark 1:14; Matthew 11:2-19; 14:2-12; Luke 7:16-22

On with the Message,
On with the Light;
First to the Jews,
With the blessing of sight;
On to Samaria, and Galilee as well,
On to the world,
With the Good News to tell.
—Fenter Northern

1. JOHN'S RECORD OF JESUS' EARLY MINISTRY

The Synoptics do not tell what happened during the first year of Jesus' ministry. The meager information we have of this period is contained in the fourth Gospel. John of Zebedee was the last living apostle. About thirty-five years after the Synoptics were penned, this aged "beloved disciple" recalls in precious memory the details of his first experiences at meeting the Messiah (ca. 93).

By the time of John's writing, the elderly apostle is far removed from the original scene of events. Irenaeus, Polycarp and other writers of the early church speak of him as living out his last years in Ephesus.[1] As the sole surviving apostle, there must have been a continual gentle urging from loving Christians at Ephesus to recall the wonderful story of love.

According to Jerome, even when the aging apostle was incapacitated by advancing age, he would have the younger men bear him to the house of assembly where with difficulty he would lift himself erect, prop himself with a cane and in a cracking voice exhort the assembly, saying: "*Little children, love one another.*"[2]

Many must have journeyed miles to hear the edifying, gratifying, spiritual lessons from the sole remaining apostle. Perhaps desiring to fill apparent gaps in the Synoptics as well as refute the rising heresy of Gnosticism, John desired to preserve for all future generations his personal account of the Gospel. With a wisdom that comes only with a long mature life of spiritual fellowship with God, after having received the scars of many battles with the foes of darkness, and with life's sun hanging low in its western sky, John yet possessing an alert and inspired mind picked up his pen and began to write the final account of the New Testament Gospel.

A. The thrust of John's Gospel

It is extremely helpful to observe the thrust of John's Gospel in order to gain a good understanding of Jesus' ministry. John states his purpose for writing at the close of his gospel with these words:

And many other signs truly did Jesus in the presence of his disciples, which are not written in this book: but these things are written, that ye might believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God; and that believing ye might have life through his name.
(Jno. 20:30-31)

To serve the purpose stated in the above text, John selected certain signs from among many signs. These he offers as proof that the spiritual age has indeed arrived with Jesus of Nazareth as the promised long awaited Messiah. He demonstrates that the new age is superior in every way to the old Jewish system. The magnificent mercy and forgiveness of God is displayed. This calls for a moral decision to be made, not only by those who were at the scene, but by every future reader as well.

B. John emphasizes eleven clear points

(1) *Jesus is superior to the law and the prophets.* Jesus is the Word that was with God in the beginning creating all things. The reader is to see especially that Jesus is the source of all light, both physical and spiritual. He is the light that radiated throughout the dark world at the creation of the universe (Jno. 1-2). Now, in the new creation, the power of that same spoken word brings light into the darkened spiritual world to make possible the recreation of man's spirit.

John points to Jesus' equality with God to help one realize Jesus' great love in condescending to dwell in a human body to restore man to God. This enabled man to behold the love of God in powerful demonstration in body as Christ went about manifesting his power in mercy and forgiveness.

(2) *Jesus is superior to John the Baptist.* John was only a herald of the new age and of the Messiah. Some may have believed John had supernatural powers. After having John killed, Herod believed that Jesus was John the Baptist resurrected from the dead.

There were many who believed that John the Baptist was the Messiah. This spawned jealousy among his disciples at Jesus' success and caused them to complain to John. The prophet manifested his greatness by telling them that he must decrease, but Jesus must increase. John gave both negative and positive testimony of Jesus' Messiahship.

First, in negative testimony, John twice denies himself as being the Christ (1:20; 3:28). He plainly states that Jesus was preferred before himself, and that he had much higher ranking.

In positive testimony, John declares forthrightly that Jesus is the Messiah. When Jesus returned to the site of his baptism in Jordan, John proclaimed: "*This is the Son of God.*" The apostle John presents Jesus as the true Old Testament paschal Lamb who saves all those within God's family from death. The church, the new house of God, is identified by having the Lamb's blood over its Door (cf. Rev. 1:5 with Acts 20:28 and I Tim. 3:15). John, the evangelist, records this testimony of John the Baptist concerning Jesus: "*Behold the Lamb of God which taketh away the sin of the world*" (Jno. 1:29).

Upon hearing this testimony by John, some of his disciples desired a private interview with Jesus to apparently settle the issue in their minds. Afterward, they came away convinced that Jesus was the Christ.

After Jesus called Philip to follow him, the latter sought out Nathanael who also became convinced. He exclaimed after an interview with Jesus: "*Thou art the Son of God; thou art the King of Israel*" (Jno. 1:50; 1:29, 34-36, 41, 49, 51).

After what must have been an astonishing revelatory teaching session from Jesus, both John the Baptist and his disciples are seen strongly endorsing the superiority of Jesus over John the Baptist.

(3) *The temple of the new age is seen as far superior to the Temple of the old system.* The Jews had corrupted the old Temple. Through hypocrisy and covetousness they had turned it into a "den of thieves." This made the Temple void of the Spirit of God

and unfit for offering any acceptable sacrifice to God. Jesus prophesied in Matthew 24 that it would soon be destroyed. The Jews deeply resented Jesus because of his caustic rebukes against their external religion. They also were jealous of the crowds that gathered to hear him and their own inability to silence him through debate. Their envy continued to grow until they finally sought to kill him. They sought to destroy the true Temple of God in which God dwelt before their very eyes. They despised and crucified him hoping this would be the end of him and his word. Speaking of his death, Jesus announced that if they destroyed the Temple (his body), he would rebuild it in three days. This was to be a sign to them but, as Jesus said, a wicked and adulterous generation cannot be given a sign. Prejudice rejects all signs against itself.

(4) *The new birth of the Spirit was superior to the old fleshly birth into Abraham's family.* A fleshly birth cannot produce a *spiritual child* in God's family. "*Every seed shall bring forth after its own kind.*" Jesus said to Nicodemus: "*That which is born of the flesh is flesh.*" The Jews could not claim heirship in God's house on the basis of their fleshly birth. When Peter confessed Jesus' true identity as the Son of God, Jesus said to him: "*Flesh and blood has not revealed this to you . . .*" (Matt. 16:18ff.). Only the new spiritual birth can yield a new living spiritual man qualifying one for the new kingdom of God (Jno. 3:3-5). Genealogy was of no importance in bringing the Jews back to God. Being born anew by the Spirit through faith in Jesus as his Son is the way God intended to bring the pedigreed Jews, like Nicodemus, back into full fellowship in the new kingdom.

But that was not all. The Jews who had lost track of their genealogy (like the Samaritans) could return also. By intermarrying with the Assyrians, the northern ten tribes had completely lost their identity. The more orthodox Judean Jews despised the Samaritans and had no fellowship with them. However, God had promised to return them to himself (Jer. 31; Hosea 3). *The new age and new spiritual birth was the amazing way that God would bring the northern Jews back to himself through faith.* John followed the Nicodemus narrative with the conversion of the Samaritans. The new spiritual birth which was made possible by faith, would be the common denominator to bring all nations together into "one family in Christ." By faith in Jesus, all Israel could be returned to God as promised. The mystery was made known how the Gentiles could be heirs in Abraham's family. Paul said in Romans: "*So* (i.e. through faith) *all Israel will be saved.*" This Israel is the church Christ promised to build. It is composed of all baptized believers. This was the great message of salvation preached after the coming of the Holy Spirit (See Acts 2:38; Mark 16:16ff.).

(5) *The new place of worship was superior to the old place of worship.* Under the new system, according to Jesus, the true worshippers of God would not need to travel to Samaria or Jerusalem to worship in earthly temples. "God is Spirit," he said, and all who worship him in the new age must worship him in spirit (in their hearts, see Jno. 4:24ff.). This makes worship universally acceptable from all believers who by faith offer spiritual sacrifices of praise to God in the spiritual temples of their hearts.

(6) *To feast upon Jesus' word, the bread of life, is superior to Israel's manna in the wilderness.* Those who ate the wilderness manna had died; but those who eat the bread of life will live forever (Jno. 6). The bread (word of wisdom) that Jesus supplies is superior because it is the spiritual food of eternal salvation.

(7) *Jesus, the sacrificial paschal Lamb of God, is superior to the Passover lamb of the Old Testament.* Those who marked their doorposts with the blood of the first paschal lamb in Egypt were spared from death by the angel on that great night when the judgment of God came upon Pharaoh for having rejected his word. Those who take refuge under the blood of the New Testament paschal Lamb will be saved from eternal death at the final judgment of God because they have believed and obeyed his Word—Jesus.

(8) *In the new kingdom of God, mercy is*

preferred over legalism. This was always true under the Old Covenant even though the Jews had ignored it. Mercy being divinely preferred over law was beautifully illustrated by the mercy seat being situated *above the law* contained inside the ark. Apparently having forgotten this, the Jews pressed Jesus to stone the adulterous woman (Jno. 8). Those who sought to kill the adulterous woman were forced by Jesus to face their own sins. Becoming ashamed, they departed and left the woman in peace. When they had departed, Jesus dismissed her, telling her to go her way and sin no more.

(9) *In Jesus, a superior light had come into the world to make men see the light of God.* The light from Jesus' face was more intense than the light that shone from Moses' face when he descended from the mount in Exodus 34. Jesus is the light of men that shines into all the world (Jno. 1). The Jews, unimpressed by the mercy the blind man had received in his healing, condemned Jesus for working on the Sabbath. By the close of chapter 9 the believing blind man not only had his eyesight restored, but had received spiritual sight as well. The path to the blind man's salvation may be progressively observed in John 9 by the following ascending steps in his belief: (a) the healed man only refers to his benefactor as "*a man called Jesus*" (vs. 11); (b) he believes Jesus is a prophet (Vs. 17); (c) he believes he is from God (vss. 30-33); and finally, (d) he believes in Jesus as the Son of God and worships him (vs. 38). True light was hidden from the Jews because they preferred their law over deeds of mercy from God. They rejected the light of God, and when divine light is rejected it always ushers in spiritual darkness. Each must make a moral evaluation regarding the light and power of Jesus' word and eventually, depending on their judgment, will be either blessed or cursed for their decision (Mk 16:16).

(10) *Jesus, as the Shepherd of God's sheep, is superior to the shepherds of Judaism* (Jno. 10). The shepherds under the Old Covenant had proved to be false and uncaring for God's sheep. Jesus said they were hirelings and cared not for the sheep, but that the true shepherd would lay down his life for them.

(11) *Jesus is superior because his word will judge all men.* Some had been raised from the dead in the Old Testament, but Jesus' word will raise all men from the grave at the final judgment of God (Jno. 5:28). This is not idle talk, as it has been confirmed by the resurrection of Lazarus even after being dead four days. By the power of his mere word, Jesus said, "Lazarus come forth," and he came forth from the grave. Even Jesus' enemies admitted the miracle. One day he will speak the word again to all in the grave.

11. THE EARLIEST DISCIPLES

In John 1:29, our Lord had just returned from the exhausting ordeal of the wilderness temptation. Having gained the victory over the devil, he has his course firmly set in mind. Having had his paths "made straight" by John the Baptist, Jesus feels he must now get on with his "Father's business." Jesus had felt such an urgency since age twelve when he was found among the religious scholars at the Temple in Jerusalem, amazing them with his profound knowledge of the Scriptures.[3]

Upon Jesus' return to the scene where John was baptizing in Jordan, the latter urged his disciples to follow Jesus, endorsing him as the Messiah and the "*Lamb of God that taketh away the sins of the world.*" Among John's disciples at Jesus' baptismal site in Jordan were Andrew, Peter, Philip and Nathanael.[4] No doubt these future apostles had already heard John the Baptist preach many great sermons on the immediate appearing of the Messiah and the kingdom of God. Their initial encounter at Jordan had made deep impressions upon these men and they were anxiously awaiting the Messiah and his new kingdom of heaven.[5] Since Jesus was practically unknown to John's disciples at this early hour, it would take more than a

routine introduction to lure them away from the magnetism of John's character and powerful preaching. The initial trickling away of John's disciples to follow Jesus became a landslide. This brought complaints from some of John's disciples who were more reluctant to switch to the new Teacher.[6]

A. John urges his disciples to follow Jesus

The climax of John's mission was reached when Jesus returned to the site of John's baptismal services at the Jordan. This was apparently soon after the interim of the temptation in the wilderness. Upon seeing Jesus' return, John the Baptist exclaimed to those present: "*Behold the Lamb of God, which taketh away the sins of the world. This is he whom I said, After me cometh a man which is preferred before me; for he was before me.*"[7]

As previously mentioned, some of John's disciples were slow to move into Jesus' camp. Although John never encouraged them, his more persistent disciples continued to preach his baptism (the future coming of the Christ). This continued long after Jesus had been crucified (Acts 19). This is true regardless of John's testimony that his ministry would be eclipsed by Jesus (Jno. 1:19-20).

Similarly, 16 centuries later, Martin Luther's followers persisted in calling themselves Lutherans even though Luther strongly opposed this, telling them to call themselves after Christ. Spurgeon, a renowned Baptist preacher, admonished his listeners in like manner, saying, "*I hope the Baptist name will soon perish; but let Christ's name endure forever.*"[8] John the Baptist, in gracious humility, referred to himself as only the friend of the Bridegroom, telling all that his mission would decrease while Jesus' ministry would increase. John added in support of Jesus: "*I indeed baptize you with water unto repentance: but he that cometh after me is mightier than I, whose shoes I am not worthy to bear: he shall baptize you with the Holy Ghost, and with fire. . . .*" (Matt. 3:11). John stated further: "*And I saw and bare record that this is the Son of God*" (Jno. 1:34). When all of this wonderful testimony is considered, the magnanimity of John's character is marvelous indeed. Some ministers of God who have felt threatened by fellow preachers of equal or greater ability, have ignored this beautiful pattern of humility. Consequently, they have hurt themselves and their ministry.

The ache for popularity and to have a large following have been the source of severe jealousies among preachers. In an effort to eliminate such thinking in his disciples, Jesus, in the upper room on the evening of his death, knelt to wash their feet and said: "*If I your Lord and Master wash your feet, ye should wash one another's feet*" (Jno. 13).[9]

THE ECLIPSE OF A GREAT PREACHER
(AN EXAMPLE FOR ALL PREACHERS)

John bear witness of him, and cried saying, This was he of whom I spake, He that cometh after me is preferred before me. —John 1:15

And he confessed, and denied not; but confessed, I am not the Christ. —John 1:20

. . . The same [Jesus] baptizeth, and all men come to him. John answered and said, . . . he must increase, but I must decrease. —Jno. 3:26, 30

B. How John's Disciples Turned to Jesus

The disciples of John were not so overly credulous that they would be willing to follow the first man that came along claiming to be the Christ. False Christs appeared on the scene frequently making great claims. As noted, some of John's disciples remained dedicated to him even though he consistently urged them to follow Jesus. John viewed those who changed their discipleship to Jesus as merely the fulfillment of his mission. They had heard him preach that Jesus was superior to himself and to be preferred. He culminated his testimony with a frank confession that Jesus was indeed the Son of God. *John's disciples desired to interrogate Jesus personally.* At Jesus' invitation, they paid him an afternoon visit and returned astonishingly convinced that he was indeed whom John said he was—the Christ, the Son of God. They proceeded to tell Peter, Nathanael, and others that they had found him of whom Moses had spoken (Jno. 1:45).

C. Nathanael: his skepticism and conversion

Nathanael was skeptical when he first heard the news about the new Messiah. He doubted that any good thing would come from such an irreputable village as Nazareth. His prejudice was soon overcome when he found himself in the presence of Jesus. Seeing Nathanael coming, Jesus complemented him, then added a few remarks about his private life that brought sudden astonishment to the disciple.

Jesus told those present that no guile was in this Nathanael. Nathanael could not understand how it was that the Lord knew him so intimately. Jesus answered the skeptical young man with these words: "*Before that Philip called thee, when thou wast under the fig tree, I saw thee*"[10] At this remark, Nathanael blurted out that Jesus was "*the Son of God and king of Israel.*"

On the surface, this strong confession from Nathanael seems to be unwarranted since Jesus' remark was a common expression. There was no particular astonishing thing about seeing a man sitting under a fig tree in Jesus day. No skeptic as Nathanael would be so hasty in reaching such a profound conclusion that Jesus was Christ, merely because of this statement. So, why did Nathanael make such an outburst of faith at no more astonishing a statement than that which Jesus had made, and why did John select such a simple story to convince his readers? Also, if there have been redactors tampering with the text as some claim, why did they leave the dialogue as it is?

It would have been a quite normal observance to see someone sitting under a fig tree outside their home. Fig trees were common, being highly desired for their fruit and shade. Their large foliage gave welcome protection from the parching heat of the bronze sun. Here, in relaxing comfort under its sprawling shade, Jewish citizens meditated upon the scriptures and their personal spiritual experiences. The Jew's desire to have a fig tree at home is mentioned by one of their prophets: "*Every man shall come to sit under his own fig tree.*"[11]

When Jesus' comments are viewed in the context of the ensuing conversation (Jno. 1:50-51), and by understanding the Jew's attraction for the fig tree as a place of rest and spiritual reflection, the reader is

helped to understand why this early skeptic believed so readily. Careful consideration must be given to Jesus' statement concerning Nathanael as being a man without guile as well as to his reference of a ladder that reached into heaven, reminiscent of Jacob's dream (Gen. 28:12).

Note that "Jacob" means guile, supplanter or "cheater." Consider that while Nathanael was under the fig tree, he was thinking about the experience his great, great grandfather had centuries before when he saw a ladder extending into heaven with the angels of God ascending and descending upon it. When Jesus said there was no guile in Nathanael, he was indicating that his heart was purer than Jacob's, and in the following verses added that Nathanael, impossible as it may seem to himself, would experience the fulfillment and meaning of his grandfather's dream. As a faithful Jew who attended the synagogue regularly, Nathanael had heard these scriptures read many times. He would have also heard about "Jacob's ladder" from his parents at the dining table. If Nathanael was thinking how grand it would be to have an experience like that while resting under the fig tree, no ordinary man could possibly have known his thoughts. Yet Jesus knew his innermost thinking. *He quickly realized that would take divine power.*

The verse following indicates Jesus had clearly read his mind and knew his secret unexpressed feelings: "*Hereafter ye shall see heaven open, and the angels of God ascending and descending upon the Son of Man.* It is no mystery that Nathanael's skepticism turned to faith so quickly.

D. Jesus departs from Jordan with his first disciples

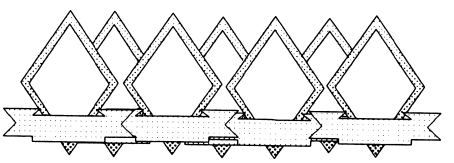
Jesus left the scene at the Jordan river with the nucleus of his new band of disciples. They headed northward to Galilee where they attended a wedding feast at Cana. Here they would experience the first confirmation of their faith in Jesus' divine Sonship by the performance of his first miracle.

At the wedding feast Jesus turned water into wine relieving an embarrassed host whose supply of wine had been depleted by the merrymaking. More importantly, this miracle increased the disciples' faith in Jesus as the Messiah. John of Zebedee specifically states that it accomplished this very end.[12] However, it is not to be supposed that their faith was perfected in understanding him to be the Son of God. This remained for the resurrection experience.

Their faith must endure many more tests and confirmations. On numerous occasions they will doubt, even falter. Peter will presume to instruct Jesus more perfectly after he has confessed him to be the Son of God. This counseling of Peter's that tried to get Jesus to avoid the cross was viewed by the Lord as an act of Satan (Matt. 16:21).

At this early moment in his discipleship, Peter's understanding of Christ's divine Sonship is limited to little more than believing Jesus to be the Messiah within the traditional Jewish concept passed down through the centuries. Had he really understood the atonement and the full truth of Jesus' identity, he would never have presumed to instruct him more perfectly in the Word.

Or might he? Some claim faith in the inerrancy of the Bible today, yet presume to write human creeds that wrest evident teachings of the word to conform to traditional doctrine. Man can no more improve God's word without coming under divine approbation than could Peter. If Jesus called Peter "Satan" for his error,[13] why would the same rebuke not be applicable for anyone who would wrest or attempt to rewrite the Bible to make it conform to human creeds?



E. The first miracle at Cana

"Whatsoever he saith unto you, do it." [14]

As we have seen in his Gospel account, John of Zebedee presents much evidence that Jesus and his mission are far superior to John the Baptist. Part of that evidence is Jesus' initial miracle of turning the "water to wine" at a wedding feast in Cana of Galilee.

The wine served at the beginning of the festivities was inferior to the new wine created by Jesus.[15] This is obvious by the comment recorded by the governor of the feast who exclaimed: *"Every man at the beginning doth set forth good wine; and when men have well drunk, then that which is worse: but thou hast kept the good wine until now."*

Note the profound spiritual implications in this:

(1) *The author of the fourth Gospel wants* the reader to see *the new spiritual age being introduced by Jesus is far superior to the old Mosaical system.* By a comparison of spiritual taste, one will realize that the old wine (law under Moses), while very good, has now at the coming of Jesus the Messiah, reached its total objective. It is, therefore, completely depleted. However, with the coming of the Messiah there is new wine in the joy of grace under the new covenant. This is better than old Judaism which only pointed toward this great moment. (Read the Hebrew Epistle). This conclusion is supported by both Joel and Amos who refer to the coming spiritual age as "new wine."[16] Also, elsewhere Jesus refers to his teaching like that of *"putting new wine into new bottles."*[17] *"For the law was given through Moses, but grace and truth came through Jesus Christ"* (Jno. 1:17).

(2) *Mary's command to the servants at the wedding also has deep spiritual implications. She said to them: "Whatsoever he saith unto you, do it"* (Jno. 2:25). These words contain the secret for unleashing the power of God. Paul said later to the Roman Christians, *"For I am not ashamed of the Gospel of Christ: for it is the power of God unto salvation . . ."* (Rom. 1:16). It was Mary's faith and the obedience of the servants that prompted Jesus to turn the water to wine at Cana, and it is ever so in the lives of the faithful. But prayers are effectual, not because one prays to Mary, *but by having this attitude of Mary's: "**Whatsoever he saith unto you, do it.**"* Christianity is validated when it is undertaken with this motive in mind. Baptism, worship and all spiritual endeavor is acceptable and effective only when we imitate this statement: *"**Whatever he commands us, do it.**"* Recall Peter's reply when Jesus requested him to cast the fishing net out once more: *"And Simon answering said unto him, Master, we have toiled all the night, and have taken nothing: nevertheless **at thy word I will** let down the net."*[17]

Abraham manifested this power releasing faith when he obeyed the call of God to leave his country not even knowing where God intended to lead him. Later, even though the angel staid his hand at the moment he was slaying Isaac, the old tried and true patriarch became the epitome of justifying faith when in full intent he offered his son Isaac upon the altar to Jehovah believing that God would raise him from the dead to fulfill his word. Jesus' faith in God to resurrect the dead to keep his word caused him to say two millenniums later: *"Abraham rejoiced to see my day: and he saw it, and was glad"* (Jno. 8:56).

F. Summary:

John wants everyone to receive this basic lesson at the initial demonstration of Jesus' power as the Messiah of God: Although *having a great taste, the Mosaical wine has* been depleted. *However, for all those who will do whatever Jesus commands, a new superior wine will be divinely served through the power of his word.* Great as John the Baptist was, he was only the friend of the Bridegroom. His purpose was to give the groom support and comfort at the wedding.

G. Jesus Cleanses the Temple

John places our Lord's encounter at the Temple with the merchandising priests at the beginning of his personal ministry. The Synoptics give the account of the Temple's cleansing at the close of Jesus' ministry during the final week of his life.[18] Some scholars, such as A. T. Robertson, perhaps feeling a need to offer an apology for what seems to be an inconsistency in the Scriptures, say that Jesus cleansed the Temple on both occasions, which he may have done.[19] While one cannot be certain one way or the other Robertson says, it appears that John placed the Temple cleansing at the beginning of Jesus' ministry to serve in the personal arrangement of his material.

The purpose of John's Gospel is not merely historical or even chronological. The purpose is redemptive and the account true, but the Gospel evangelists present their material in a manner best suited for their personal style of presentation. The flow of the material in the Synoptics is a gradual progressive revelation of Jesus' miracles and teaching that builds to a climax to convince the reader that Jesus is the Christ. In the Synoptics, this comes at Caesarea Philippi late in the ministry of Jesus.[20]

At this point an evident change can be observed in the teaching of Jesus, especially in Matthew's material. Up through Matthew 16:20, Jesus' teaching is centered on miracles with related lessons calculated to enable the reader with "ears to hear" and "eyes to see" discover his divine identity.

In the first part of teaching and association with the disciples, Jesus ushered these men toward sufficient insight to correctly answer the question: "*Who am I?*" When they finally discovered Jesus' true identity at Caesarea Philippi, though still very limited in their comprehension of its full meaning, they reached a high point of faith that equipped them for the second phase of Jesus' instruction.

After arriving at this midpoint in their discipleship designated by Peter's confession of Jesus as Christ, Jesus launches the last phase of his instruction with this additional theme: *the Messiah must suffer and die at Jerusalem.*[21]

However, John's Gospel does not follow the division of themes as viewed here in Matthew. He does not move his readers through a progressive presentation of evidence like the other narratives until the disciples make the great discovery of Jesus' deity at Caesarea Philippi.

John plunges immediately and headlong into his narrative with the bold declaration that Jesus is God and absolutely the long awaited Messiah. Also, early in his account he alludes to the sacrificial atonement of Jesus' blood by giving John the Baptist's testimony that Jesus is the "*Lamb of God which taketh away the sins of the world.*"

"And he said unto them that sold doves, Take these things hence; make not my Father's house an house of merchandise." —John 2:16

"And through covetousness shall they with feigned words make merchandise of you: whose judgment now of a long time lingereth not, and their damnation slumbereth not." —II Peter 2:3

John of Zebedee records Jesus' cleansing of the Temple at the beginning of his ministry thereby laying a good foundation for his unique and orderly method of presenting his Gospel story.

Because the old Temple had been corrupted by the covetous priests, forcing the departure of God's Spirit, it was dead. It would be destroyed by the enemies of Israel and never be rebuilt of stone again by authority of God. (See Matthew 24). "*Not one stone,*" Jesus said, "*would be left upon another.*"[22] The new Temple of God, the new spiritual body of Christ, would replace it. Although the Jews would seek to destroy the new Temple (Jesus' earthly body), they would not be successful. He would raise the Temple on the third day, then ascend back to the father in heaven to receive the new kingdom of God (Dan. 7).

The Spirit would then be sent to inhabit the new spiritual body of believers, the church of Christ (See Acts 2). This new spiritual Temple, indwelt by the Holy Spirit, would be the hearts of all believers in the kingdom of heaven (I Cor. 6; Mk 16:15-16).[23]

H. Acceptable sacrifice demands a clean temple

The old wilderness tabernacle constructed of goat skin and other perishable things was a portable structure suitable for the wilderness wanderings and a forerunner of the Temple.[24] It was divided within by a beautiful veil of blue, purple and scarlet that separated the holy place from the most holy place. The most holy place contained the Ark of the Covenant above which was the mercy seat of God. Here God dwelt in the midst of Israel's camp in the wilderness days before king Solomon of the tenth century. To designate God's presence in the camp, a cloud hovered over the most holy place by day and a pillar of fire by night. When God wanted the camp to move, the pillar would rise and drift in the direction of march.

After possessing the land of promise, Solomon built the temple, which took eight years to construct. After its dedication by Solomon, God's Spirit took up residence in the new Temple. He would dwell here as long as it remained undefiled. The glory of God's presence (the *sheckinah)* was guaranteed as long as Israel kept her covenant relationship by being obedient to God's will. But Israel persistently sinned and refused to repent. After repeated warnings from the prophets throughout centuries, God allowed the Temple to be destroyed by King Nebuchadnezzar of Babylon in 586 B.C. At this time the Spirit of God lifted itself from the condemned Temple and moved "toward the east gate." This signified the Spirit's departure from Jerusalem to follow the faithful remnant into Babylonian captivity.[25] After fulfilling the prophecy of seventy long years of purification in the fire of Babylonian slavery, Babylon was conquered by the Persians. The monarch Cyrus issued a decree which allowed the Jews to return to Jerusalem and rebuild their Temple, even helping finance it. The Temple was dedicated during the sixth year of the reign of Darius in 516 B.C. After this cleansing, acceptable sacrifices could again be offered at the Temple.[26]

After his conquest of Jerusalem during the period between the Testaments, the Greek madman Antiocus Epiphanes in 175 B.C. made an attempt to force hellenization upon the Jews. He defiled the Temple by offering a pig sacrifice on the altar and then sprinkling its broth on the furniture inside. [27] To the Jews, this was a filthy abomination. During the Maccabbean revolt between the Testaments, the Jews successfully retook Jerusalem and cleansed the Temple from these abominations. This Temple cleansing occurred on the twenty-fifth of Chislev (December; Hanukkah). Once again it was possible to offer acceptable sacrifices on a clean altar.[28] During the life of Jesus, the Temple area was again polluted by the covetous materialism of the priests who greatly overcharged the pilgrims for their "pre-approved" animal sacrifices. Despising such practices, Jesus entered the Temple area, passionately denounced their covetous merchandising and told them they had made his Father's house "a den of thieves."[29]

Jesus cleansed the Temple by driving out those who bartered in the court area, overturning the money changers' tables in the process. This cleansing prepared the way for the offering of the most precious sacrifice that had ever been offered—the Lamb of God that could atone for the sins of the whole world.

The Jews ridiculed Jesus for saying he would rebuild the Temple in three days if they destroyed it. They thought he was speaking of Herod's Temple which had taken the builders over forty years to enlarge. However, John is careful to say that the Temple in mind was Jesus' body. This, he says, is the true dwelling place for the Spirit of God. In perfect faith and obedience Jesus kept this Temple holy and unspotted, which qualified it as an acceptable sacrifice for the world's sins. When Jesus offered himself in sacrifice on the cross, he asked God to receive his Spirit. On the following Pentecost after his death at the Passover, the Spirit returned to the new spiritual body of Christ—the church.[30] As it did for Adam at the first creation, the inbreathing of the Spirit on Pentecost made alive this new spiritual body that had been prepared through the holiness of Jesus. The new Temple was dedicated on Pentecost when the Spirit descended to take up residence in the hearts of all who believed the word (Acts 2).

This new Temple is the sanctuary within the heart of every true believer. Only here can acceptable worship be offered to Jehovah (Acts 15:9). Paul told the Corinthian church they were the Temple and habitation of God (I Cor. 6:19). The necessity of keeping the Temple of God holy is enjoined upon all Christians. This enables God to continue to dwell in the heart by faith. Only on these clean stipulations can the sacrifices of God's new holy priesthood be offered.[31] No priest could enter Solomon's Temple to offer acceptable sacrifice without both himself and the Temple having been purified. Under the New Testament system, Peter says one is purified by obeying the truth through the Spirit. He is born again by the incorruptible word of God (I Pet. 1:22-23). Both the purification of the Temple and the heart are by the same process.

Under the old system, the Jews washed their bodies with water before they cleansed the Temple with the blood of animal sacrifices.[32] Today, the Temple of God (the Christian's heart) must be cleansed by the blood of Jesus. "*If we walk in the light, as he is in the light, we have fellowship one with another, and the blood of Jesus Christ his Son cleanseth us from all sin*" (I Jno. 1:7). But, as no priest under the law could offer acceptable service in the Temple without first having ceremonially cleansed himself by bathing in water, even so a candidate for cleansing in Christ's blood must submit to what Peter calls a "*washing of water by the word.*"[33] This makes the conversation with Nicodemus all the more essential and enlightening.

III. THE INTERVIEW WITH NICODEMUS

During the Passover feast of John 2:13, the Master confirmed his deity by working many miracles at Jerusalem. Although John's Gospel does not mention them, Nicodemus' attention was attracted to Jesus by his miracles. Some believe that the conversation with Nicodemus took place much later in the life of Jesus. Tatian in his *Diatessaron* (2nd century), a harmony of the Gospels, says it belongs to the last week of Jesus' life. There is no way to establish a chronological order to the events in John. The author has told us this was not his purpose in writing (Jno. 20:30). If the narrative does belong to the last week, there must have been a great many gathered in the holy city for the Passover who noticed that there was a new prophet in town. Regardless of the crowd and the popularity of Jesus, John tells us of only one soul in the city that week who sought out Jesus for a private interview. Nicodemus, a high ranking Jewish nobleman, prompted by the astonishing works he had seen Jesus perform earlier in the day, came in the early

evening hours seeking further information about what had stirred his curiosity.

Nicodemus had been attracted to something he had observed in Jesus far beyond anything he had seen or heard among the multitude of Rabbis he knew in the city. Had this member of the Sanhedrin observed earlier the flashing anger of Jesus in the Temple courtyard as he thrust over the money changers tables and put them to rout? Was Nicodemus the type of man who secretly approved of Jesus' action because inwardly he also despised the hypocritical and illegal profiteering of the priests at the expense of the worshippers? Could it be that Nicodemus was longing and looking for the Christ?

One simply does not know. What we do know is, Nicodemus was drawn to Jesus by what he had observed in this Man, hoping that he was someone great, perhaps even the Messiah who could clear up the abuses that engulfed the Temple worship—practices that made him nauseous. We do know Nicodemus was drawn to Jesus by what he had observed in this Man's actions earlier in the day—actions he could not get out of his mind. God alone could do and speak the things he had heard Jesus say on the streets. Had he heard Jesus speak to someone earlier: "*Thy sins be forgiven thee*"? Jesus' statement was insufferable blasphemy, unless—yes, unless he was truly God in the flesh. He had to investigate this further and settle his mind about the matter. He had definitely reached the conclusion that there was something unique about Jesus. Something in this man went far beyond that of a mere rabbi.

This can be seen in Nicodemus' opening remarks at the interview. His evaluation was:

> *"No man can do these miracles that thou doest, except God be with him."*

Jesus ignored the compliments of this Pharisee, genuine as they might have been, and showed no interest in pursuing the subject of miracles. Nicodemus had been drawn to him by his unique works, and Jesus had granted him an interview. Jesus performed miracles to confirm his divine authority to forgive sins. By such power he would establish the kingdom of heaven. He would, by the word of mercy, free sinners who believed from their alliance with Satan and death by bringing them to himself as the source of life.[34] Regardless of his Jewish pedigree and high position as ruler of the Jews, Nicodemus had to be reborn before he could ever "see the kingdom of God." This being the chief concern of the Master, this caused Jesus to plunge directly into the theme of rebirth to save the official's soul.

Looking back upon the scene, one views Nicodemus as a fine example of the Jewish tradition. He comes to Jesus seeking a personal interview, not because Jesus was unique in claiming to be the Christ, for "Christ claimers" were common, but because of the unique power that supported his claims.

Nicodemus posed quite a contrast from the other learned men of the day in that he permitted himself to be instructed by a "nobody from Nazareth," who was very unpopular with the priests. Motivated by envy against Jesus, they wanted this nobleman to help convict Jesus of a capital crime. It was risky business to merely be seen with him. Even so, Nicodemus came seeking a personal interview with this man and for this he is to be greatly admired.

Jewish tradition had been strongly condemned by John the Baptist preaching that God was nearing the end of his patience with those who refused to repent. He told them that God had laid the axe at the root of the Jewish tree and if no fruit could be found on it, the tree would be hewn down by the husbandman and burned. He further told them that there was no merit in simply being a fleshly descendant of Abraham because God could make children of Abraham from the stones of the ground. After John's ministry, Jesus preached that in himself a greater than Moses had arrived and invited all men to come to that greater prophet.[35] Since the new era was entirely spiritual, and citizenship was determined by God's Word written internally, a new birth was absolutely essential

for all of humanity. God would reign in the new kingdom, not by outward edicts written on tables of stone, but from an inward belief in his righteousness. From God's throne in the invisible shrine of the believer's soul, the Holy Spirit would rule from God's mercy seat. Here, from this innermost holy place in the believer's soul, God would dwell in the new order governing the believer's conscience by faith. The conscience of a believer had been sprinkled with a better blood than animals. It was cleansed by Jesus' blood, who as High Priest after the order of Melchizedek, offered himself as the perfect sacrifice for sin (I Pet. 1:18-19). Regarding this matter, Paul later said: "*Old things are passed away; behold, all things are become new*" (II Cor. 5:17).

Peter said that Christians are "*born again, not of corruptible seed, but of incorruptible, by the word of God which liveth and abideth forever*" (I Pet. 1:23). This apostle had personally experienced this. While in the company of Jesus, he had been led by convincing evidence to confess him as the Son of God (Matt. 16:18).

Jesus swept all the small talk of Nicodemus aside and came immediately to the issue. The ruler of the Jews had to be born again in order to have part in the kingdom of God. He must be changed from within, have a new thinking, a new love and a will to serve God in spirit in order to reap the inheritance of Abraham's blessing in Christ. The words that follow from Jesus seemed so radical and alien to Nicodemus' mind, he was completely unable to grasp the spiritual nature of Jesus' message. When Jesus spoke of being born again, he replied: "*How can a man be born again when he is old? Can he enter a second time into his mother's womb, and be born?*" His question immediately reflects how alien the Sanhedrin's thinking was to the Spiritual dimensions of God's word.

Why The New Birth is Essential

1. TO RECREATE THE RUINED SPIRIT OF MAN, THUS MAKING HIM A NEW CREATURE IN CHRIST (II CORINTHIANS 5:17).

2. TO MAKE IT POSSIBLE FOR ONE TO BE A CHILD OF ABRAHAM AND BE AN HEIR TO THE PROMISE GOD MADE TO HIM (GALATIANS 3:24-29).

3. BECAUSE "FLESH AND BLOOD" CANNOT INHERIT THE KINGDOM OF HEAVEN (I CORINTHIANS 15:50).

Jesus chided the official for his inability to think in the spirit. Being reborn was a physical impossibility to Nicodemus. His error was due to a heart condition. His mental toggle switch was set in the "flesh mode" rather than in the "Spirit mode." As long as one only thinks in fleshly terms, Jesus says he cannot even "see the kingdom of God," much less enter it. Material or fleshly thinking persisted among the Jews in the first century which hindered many from seeing the truth. It is still a great obstacle to faith today. Paul spoke the following on this subject when writing the Corinthians:

—Read This—

But their minds were blinded: for until this day remaineth the same veil untaken away in the reading of the old testament which veil is done away in Christ. But even unto this day, when Moses is read, the veil is upon their heart. Nevertheless, when it shall turn to the Lord, the veil shall be taken away. Now the Lord is that Spirit: and where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is liberty. But we all, with open face beholding as in a glass the glory of the Lord, are changed from glory to glory even as by the Spirit
120 *of the Lord. Therefore seeing we have this ministry, as we have received mercy, we faint not; but have renounced the hidden things of dishonesty, not walking in craftiness, nor handling the word of God deceitfully, but by manifestation of the truth concerning ourselves to every man's conscience in the sight of God. But if our Gospel be hid, it is hid to them that are lost; in whom the god of this world hath blinded the minds of them that believe not, lest the light of the glorious gospel of Christ, who is the image of God, should shine unto them. For we preach not ourselves, but Christ Jesus the Lord; and ourselves your servants for Christ's sake. For God who commanded the light to shine out of darkness, hath shined in our hearts, to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ (II Cor. 3:13-4:6).*

This is a chronic error that prevents those who love other things more than salvation from seeing the glory of the kingdom of God.

Nicodemus had many preconceived ideas based on Jewish traditions that had been passed down through the centuries. Traditionally speaking, this is equally true of many today. If God's word is to have its powerful effect, it is imperative for one to be willing to forsake all things contrary to Christ's will. Pet sins are extremely difficult to put away. No matter how cherished, nothing can be allowed to stand between us and salvation in Christ. It is no more acceptable to excuse oneself because "My father or mother never believed like this," than it was in the days of Christ's personal ministry (Lu. 14). Simply being religious is not sufficient to warrant inheritance in the kingdom of heaven. Christ does not become our King by oral confession alone (Matt.15:8-9; Lu.6:46). He said:

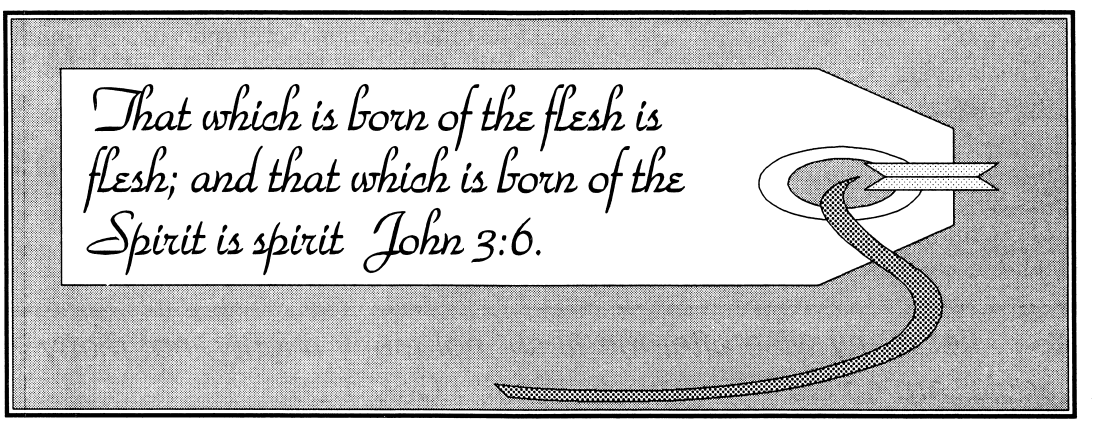
> *If any man come to me, and hate not his father, and mother, and wife, and children, and brethren, and sisters, yea, and his own life also, he cannot be my disciple .*[36]

Because he is the Word of God and King of kings, Jesus must not only be acknowledged by the mouth, his word must be permitted to rule over one's life completely. There is no valid spiritual conversion short of this.[37] This conversion demands a change from the subtle self-serving which always attempts to justify selfishness and ambition over an unconditional surrender to Jesus. Because this change is so radical to the old fleshly appetites, the New Testament writers refer to it as being "born again," or being "*alive from the dead.*"[38] Jesus replied to Nicodemus, saying: "*That which is born of the flesh is flesh; and that which is born of the Spirit is spirit*" (Jno. 3:6). He reminds him that a repeat of the fleshly birth would not make the slightest change in one's spirit, regardless of the genuineness of a fleshly pedigree that went all the way back to Abraham. Flesh begets flesh—its family is flesh as well as its blessings and inheritances. His pedigree of Jewish genealogy was more of pride than spiritual help to Nicodemus. His heart must undergo a spiritual regeneration in accepting God's will and grace in Christ. How could all this be accomplished? Jesus' answer was:

> *Except a man be born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God (John 3:3; Titus 3:5).*

The new spiritual mind accompanying the new birth opens one's spiritual eyes enabling one to perceive the nature of the kingdom. One who continues under the domination of fleshly appetites is prevented from seeing the full nature of the heavenly kingdom. Many Jews in Jesus' day possessed such spiritual blindness. Even when confronted with miracles of great compassion like healing the sick and causing the blind to see—great miracles of mercy for the express purpose of melting their hearts—they still refused to believe.

The Sabbath was never intended to be a moratorium on mercy. There is never a divine holiday when grace and mercy are unavail-



able. What an awful hour if God took such a vacation. The greatest comfort of a saved sinner is that there is never a moment when he is not covered by the grace of God. Legislation against any work on the Sabbath by Jesus' day had reached a peak. The Talmud contained 24 chapters of minute legal details of forbidden trivial acts such as a tailor carrying a needle or anyone wearing false teeth. Dragging a chair was forbidden because the legs might cut a furrow in the earth, etc. The chief priests even banned deeds of human mercy for fear the Sabbath would be broken. Saving an animal from a mud quire was permitted, however.

When personal possessions were at stake, such as saving one's ox that had fallen into a ditch, one could ignore tradition and free it, but they were merciless toward their fellowman. Jesus denounced them as hypocrites for this (Lu. 13:15).

Because Jesus' miracles were public and undeniable, they could not deny them. However, they stubbornly refused to confess that miracles of mercy, as healing the impotent man (Jno. 5), could be done on the Sabbath. Mercy is God's work. But their traditional Sabbath observance prevented him from being a merciful God on the day devoted to him. They even said that merciful deeds on the Sabbath were of Beelzebub, the prince of demons. This attributed God's mercy to devils. They had developed an impenetrable hardness by building a protective armor about their mind against love and truth. This is the reason they failed to see God manifested in Jesus. Jesus accused them of blasphemy against the Holy Spirit. Such stubbornness of heart made it impossible for them ever to be forgiven.[39]

The lawyers, scribes and Pharisees saw themselves as guides to the blind, yet Jesus reproved them for being completely devoid of spiritual eyesight.[40] In a frank denunciation, Jesus called them children of the devil (Jno. 8:44). Children of God could never consider goodness and mercy as acts of Satan. Those who were sensitive to the Spirit's influence through the Word were said to have "eyes to see" and "ears to hear."

Those who have once seen the truth but reserve for themselves pet sins, who continually ignore the influence of the Holy Spirit upon their consciences, will eventually extinguish the flickering spiritual light in the shrine of their souls. This can happen to an entire congregation (Rev. 3:17-18). Beware of those who would teach that Christians are immune to such sins today (I Cor. 10:12; 9:27).

While many high, and mighty, and noble are called, few find place for repentance. Nicodemus, one of the few, responded with faith and sought the kingdom of heaven. At first he is reluctant to become an open disciple. Later, at the death of Jesus, his faith is made evident when he is seen bringing one hundred pounds of expensive spices to anoint the body of Jesus at his burial (Jno. 19:39).

As well intentioned as the disciples were in seeking to prepare Jesus' body for decay, their actions reveal how little they understood his teaching about his resurrection in three days (e.g. the message to Martha and Mary in Jno. 11). Had they understood Jesus' teaching concerning his soon resurrection, why would they have made any attempt to embalm his body? Jesus had repeatedly told them that he would rise from the dead on the third day (Matt. 16:21).

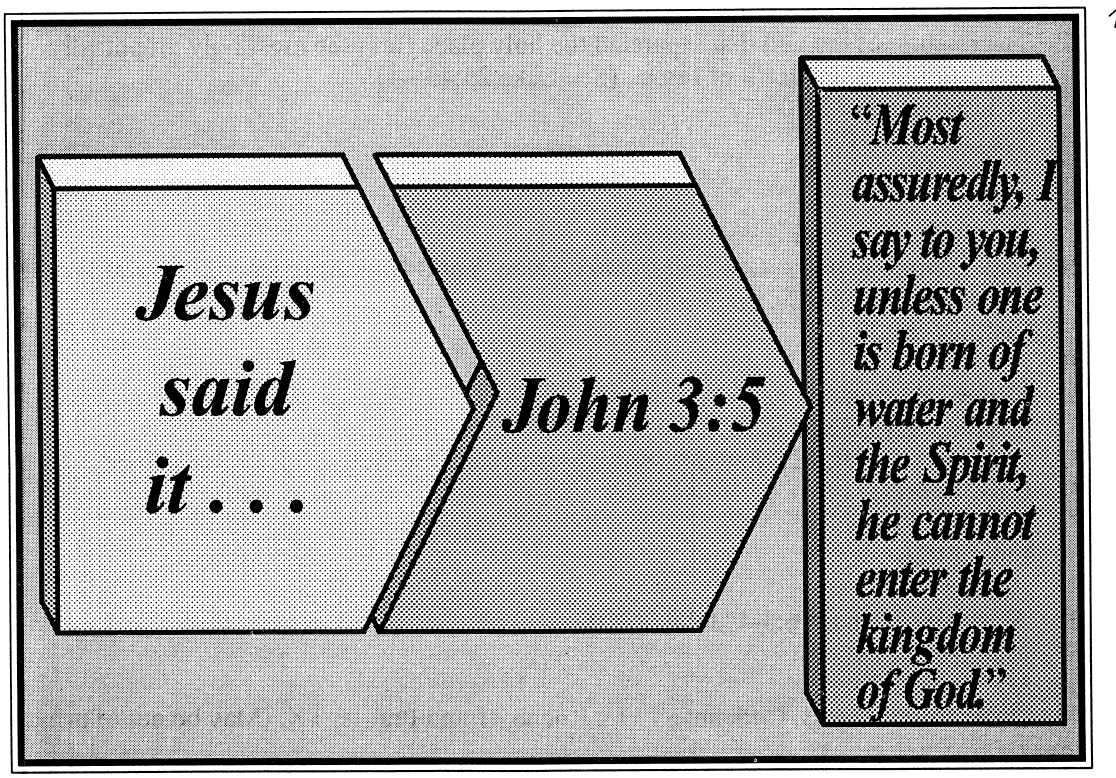
But let us not be too quick to find fault. Many who now profess faith in the resurrection may find themselves scratching their heads when it really happens to them. Even though Jesus' resurrection and the disciples' testimony of that fact are now history, many still refuse to believe, even after Jesus' resurrection. This is true in spite of the sudden great empowering change that occurred in the lives of the disciples which enabled them to suffer incredible torture for their testimony.

". . . not many wise after the flesh, not many mighty, not many noble, are called." —Apostle Paul, I Cor. 1:26

A. The New Birth

Perry B. Cotham has written a tract entitled *The New Birth,* In it, he states:

A birth means a transaction, a change of state or relationship, and it results in a new life in a new realm. By the New Birth one is translated into a new environment. When is the transfer made? What is the realm? "Therefore if any man be in Christ, he is a new creature: old things have passed away: behold all things are become new" (II Cor. 5:17). Since we are a new creature in Christ, we enter into a new life when we enter into Him. But when does one enter into Christ? "Know ye not, that as many of us as were baptized into Christ were baptized into his death" (Rom. 6:3)? Again, "For as many of you as were baptized into Christ have put on Christ" (Gal. 3:27). A person is baptized into Christ, and the person in Christ is a new creation, "a new being," a Christian. By following the Spirit's instructions, one becomes a Christian. He is baptized according to the teaching of the Spirit after he has been made a believer by hearing the Spirit's message. This message is the word of truth in the New Testament. In being "born of the Spirit," there is an inward, spiritual change affected by the Holy Spirit. The human spirit undergoes a deep and vital change in its conceptions, conviction and affections. By the spirit the human heart is regenerated with new and holy principles of life. When he implants noble ideas in the mind, the heart is changed, the love of sin is abandoned, and the person resolves to turn to God in complete obedience to live a life of holiness. All this is done by the Holy Spirit through the Gospel.[41]



References

1. Eusebius Pamphilus, *Eusebius Ecclesiastical History,* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Baker Book House, 1981), p. 101
2. *Ibid,* p. 101
3. Luke 2:46
4. John 1:40-51
5. Mark 1:4, 5
6. John 3:26
7. John 1:28-29
8. Consult these two works: *Works of Martin Luther,* (Weimar edition). VIII, pp. 684-685 and Mayer, F. E. *The Religious Bodies of America,* p. 127.
9. J. Patterson Smyth, *The Bible In The Making,* (New York: James Pott and Co., 1914), p. 166ff
10. John 1:48-49
11. I Kings 4:25
12. John 2:11
13. Matt. 16:23
14. John 2:25
15. John 2:1-11
16. Joel 3:18; Amos 9:13
17. Luke 5:5
18. Matthew 2:1; Mark 11; Luke 19
19. A. T. Robertson's, *A Harmony of the Gospels,* (New York: Harper and Row, 1950) p. 25
20. Matthew 16:13-18
21. Matthew 16:21
22. The rending of the veil that separated the holy place from the most holy graphically depicted this at the death of Jesus. (See Luke 25:43-44)
23. I Corinthians 6:19-20
24. See Exodus 25ff.
25. Ezekiel 10
26. Ezra 6
27. See chapter one of this book, page 19.
28. Max I. Dimont, *Jews, God and History,* (New York: New American Library of World Literature, Inc., 1862), pp. 83-86
29. Matthew 21:22
30. Acts 1, 2
31. I Peter 2:5; Romans 12:1-2
32. Hebrews 9:13; Exodus 16
33. Ephesians 5:23ff; Matthew 28:18-20; Mark 16:15-16; Acts 2:38; 22:16; I Peter 3:21
34. Luke 19:10
35. Matthew 11:11
36. Luke 14:26
37. Hebrews 8:10
38. Acts 3:19; Romans 6:3-4; John 6:24ff.
39. Matthew 12:24
40. Matthew 13:14
41. Order from Perry B. Cotham, 817 La Roche, Grand Prairie, TX. (May be out of print.)

Supplementary Readings

Branscomb, B. Harvie. *The Teachings of Jesus,* (New York: Abingdon Press, 1959) Ch. VI
Holdcroft, L. Thomas. *The Four Gospels,* (Summas Washington: CeePicc, 1986) Ch. 3
Jansen, Irvin L. *The Life of Christ,* (Chicago: Moody Press, 1986) Lessons 4 and 5
Tenny, Merril C. *John, The Gospel of Belief,* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 5th ed., 1980) Chapter IV

Questions for Chapter Six

1. Which narrative of the Gospel reveals the earliest activities of Jesus' ministry? What were these activities?
2. What could have partly motivated John to write the fourth Gospel?
3. Name the disciples in John's Record that were called in Jesus' early Judean ministry.
4. Discuss the first miracle performed by Jesus. Include both the immediate reason for it and the various spiritual implications.
5. Discuss the cleansing/s of the Temple as to the different time frames given by the Synoptics and John. What was the great significance of this event?
6. Research Nicodemus. Discuss his life, position and encounter with Jesus.
7. Discuss the spiritual eyesight in relationship to individuals who are either enabled to see the kingdom of heaven, or are prevented from doing so. What may be said of the causes and results of ignoring one's conscience?
8. What example is given in the text that depicts today's blindness? Make a list of your own examples.
9. Research the Biblical verses that tell one explicitly how to enter *into* Christ and list and memorize them.
10. Discuss thoroughly John 3:3-5
11. Summarize the eleven points in the "thrust" of John's Gospel.

Outline for Chapter Seven

The Kingdom Draws Near

I. Apocalyptic Fervor Preceded John the Baptist
   A. An essential ingredient of the kingdom would be the faithful keeping of God's covenant
   B. The new order was to have its beginning at Jerusalem, initiating an era called the "last days."

II. When Did the Kingdom Arrive?
   A. Why it could not come during John the Baptist's ministry.
   B. Why the kingdom could not have come during Jesus' earthly life.
   C. The kingdom came on the first Pentecost after Jesus' resurrection and ascension

III. The Nature of the Kingdom of God
   A. The kingdom would come inwardly by faith
   B. The kingdom would not come outwardly
   C. Miracles were not guaranteed in exchange for "love offerings"
   D. Jesus viewed Satan as the enemy, not Caesar

IV. Other Features of the Church/kingdom
   A. It is a fellowship of the redeemed
   B. The church kingdom is universal in scope
   C. We await the consummation of all things

EXCITEMENT WAS EVERYWHERE

Chapter Seven

The Kingdom Draws Near

Matthew 3; 16:13-18; Mark 1; Luke 17:21

More about Jesus on his throne,
Riches and Glory all his own;
More of his kingdom sure increase;
More of his coming Prince of Peace.

E. E. Hewitt

1. APOCALYPTIC FERVOR PRECEDED JOHN THE BAPTIST

An air of excitement prevailed that God was about to break into history and that the "end time" was now imminent. Then John the Baptist suddenly appeared upon the scene baptizing Jesus and proclaiming him to be the Messiah of Hebrew Prophecy. Apocalyptic literature, such as the book of Enoch and Jubilees, had been circulating for many years proclaiming the arrival of the "end time." Stories were circulating everywhere about angels, visions and dreams all heralding the new order of God to be at hand and bringing swift judgment upon the wicked. The visit of the magi from the distant east indicates these reports had circulated to distant countries.

These "wise men" had come from afar in search of the great King whom they knew would be of universal significance because they had read the sign of his birth in a brilliant star which had suddenly appeared in the heavens.

As noted in chapter three, the Hebrews anxiously awaited the arrival of the Deliverer. Due to the phenomenal excitement generated by circulating eschatological literature, the world was ready for someone to appear heralding the coming of the new order. John came in the midst of this aura of readiness and they rushed out to hear him proclaim the time had arrived for the Messiah and his new order to break into history.

Joyful anticipation filled the hearts of the faithful when John the Baptist and a few months later, Jesus, began preaching the kingdom of heaven was soon to appear.[1] The Old Testament closed with the prophetic trumpet of Malachi announcing: "*Behold, I will send my messenger before me: and the Lord, whom ye seek, shall suddenly come to his temple, even the messenger of the covenant, whom ye delight in . . .*"[2] This prophecy was not entirely new to the ears of the Hebrews as they had been hear-

STORIES WERE CIRCULATING EVERYWHERE ABOUT ANGELS, VISIONS AND DREAMS, ALL HERALDING THE NEW ORDER OF GOD TO BE AT HAND.

ing the prophets read in their synagogues for centuries.

There were vivid prophetic passages throughout their sacred Old Testament scrolls, some dating back beyond the 8th century B.C., causing many of their hearts to hope and wonder. However, from Malachi's day (400 B.C.), considerable anticipation began to mount concerning the arrival of the prophet spoken by Moses. The Deliverer, the Messiah and King, would reestablish David's throne and rule from Jerusalem once again. This expectation gradually increased during the intervening years of the Old and New Testament, reaching a peak at the coming of John and Jesus.[3] God had sought to establish a spiritual sovereignty over his people since the days of the great exodus from Egypt. He had expressed the desire to live in the midst of His people from the beginning of this campaign. Three months after the crossing of the Red Sea, Moses made this statement: "*You have seen what I did unto the Egyptians, and how I bore you on eagles' wings, and brought you unto myself. Now therefore, if you will obey my voice indeed, and keep my covenant, then ye shall be a peculiar treasure unto me above all other people: for all the earth is mine: and ye shall be unto me a kingdom of priests, and a holy nation.*"[4]

A. An essential ingredient of the kingdom would be the faithful keeping of God's new covenant (Jer. 31:31ff.)

The prophets of the Old Testament abound in scathing denunciations against Israel for wantonly breaking their covenant with Jehovah. In clear prophetic passages, as Isaiah 1:19-31 and Jeremiah 25:12, they trumpeted an impending seventy year punishment in exile by a pagan power which could be avoided only by Israel's immediate repentance.

Afterward, these same prophets prophesied the old covenant would be superseded by a new one because they had persistently failed to keep the old.[5] Entering the new kingdom necessitated having the word of God written in every citizen's heart.

B. This new order was to have its beginning at Jerusalem, initiating an era called the "last days."[6]

At its establishment all nations would "flow into it." By interpreting Nebuchadnezzar's dream Daniel revealed this new kingdom would come during a third kingdom following that pagan monarch. We now know historically that the kingdom to arise to be composed of "iron and miry clay" was the Roman Empire.

The new kingdom would be unlike all other worldly powers because it could never be destroyed.[7] This is true because the powers of the kingdom of darkness, awesome as they are, are no match for the Prince of Light. It is also true because the new kingdom was to be a spiritual and not a material power; therefore, no nation could march its conquering armies against it.

A great power that reigns within a person cannot be conquered by armies, even though they imprison the body. To bring this inner rule of God into existence, it was necessary for Israel to repent. There was an old saying among the rabbis which went like this: "*If Israel would repent for only a day, the Messiah would come!*"

Repentance was the impelling theme that dominated the great work of John the Baptist. He was a voice in the wilderness crying out to Israel: "*Repent ye: for the kingdom of heaven is at hand.*"

This voice, echoing among the wilderness hills of Judea, brought the countryside out to hear John and receive his baptism, thus preparing themselves for the coming of the Messiah and his new kingdom.[8]

At last, the kingdom of heaven was at hand! All the prophecies from the protevangelion (Genesis 3:15), to the closing words

of Malachi, were focused upon this moment. Every young Jewish home longed to be historically eternized by giving birth to the Deliverer of Israel.[9] They felt the galling yoke of Rome would soon be removed. Truly, John's message was fresh water for the thirsty soul who was anxiously waiting to hear the "good news."

About midway into his ministry, John baptized Jesus, who also immediately began to preach the message of repentance. Jesus called twelve men to disciple in the fundamentals of the new kingdom. These men he would educate in his wisdom, create faith in himself as the Son of God, and cause to receive the enabling Spirit. They would then continue the work of the kingdom after his exodus via the cross.[10] About a year after calling the twelve, Jesus sent seventy more into surrounding villages with the power to confirm the message of his coming by healing the sick.[11]

After his resurrection, Jesus gave some last minute instructions to his disciples concerning things pertaining to the upcoming kingdom. We know by this that the kingdom had not arrived immediately before his ascension.[12] We also understand by this, preaching the imminence of the kingdom or "preparation period" began with the preaching of John the Baptist and continued until after the resurrection of Jesus. This included a forty day instructional period during which he taught them things "pertaining to the kingdom of God" (Acts 1:6-8).

II. WHEN DID THE KINGDOM ARRIVE?

A. Why it could not have come during John the Baptist's ministry

John preached the kingdom of heaven was "at hand," therefore it was not present during his ministry.[13] He also said his baptism was by *water only*—in contrast to Jesus' baptisms which would include both the Holy Spirit and fire—"*He shall baptize you with the Holy Spirit and fire.*"[14] Jesus had an authority from heaven to give the Holy Spirit of promise to those who received his word and to bring a judgment of fire upon those who rejected it.

This being true, the kingdom which was to come in the power of the Holy Spirit and enabling strength did not arrive under John's ministry. In James 2:26, we are told that "*the body without the spirit is dead.*" Although in a different context, this statement is universally true; by it we know the kingdom could not have come during the days of John the Baptist because that would have been prior to the Spirit's coming in Acts 2. If the kingdom of heaven (the church of Christ) had been in existence at this early period, it would have been a dead body of people as it would have been a body without the Spirit. Christ's blood had not been shed during John the Baptist's ministry, the new body of God's people had not been purchased with the blood of Christ (Acts 20:28), nor redeemed by the blood of the Lamb. Consequently, if the church was in existence prior to Pentecost in Acts 2, it was Spiritless, lifeless, and unredeemed. Jesus indicated John was never in the kingdom of heaven when he said: "*Among them born of women there has not arisen a greater than John the Baptist: notwithstanding he that is least in the kingdom of heaven is greater than he.*" When Jesus spoke these words, John was in prison awaiting his death. It is evident by this passage that the kingdom had not come at this time.[15]

The Kingdom Came During the Lifetime of Some of Jesus' Disciples

"And he said unto them, Verily I say unto you, That there be some of them that stand here, which shall not taste of death, till they have seen the kingdom of God come with power." (MAR 9:1 KJV)

B. Why the kingdom could not have come during Jesus' earthly life

The kingdom is spoken of as "soon to come" until after Pentecost in Acts 2, then references refer to it as being present.

Like John, Jesus began his preaching by proclaiming the kingdom of heaven to be *at hand.* He also taught his disciples to pray for the coming of the kingdom.[16] Mark's Gospel says the kingdom had not yet arrived (9:1). It was, however, drawing very near. Regarding a certain Joseph, Mark reveals: "*Joseph of Arimathea, an honorable counselor, which also waited for the kingdom of God, came, and went in boldly unto Pilate, and craved the body of Jesus.*"[17] By this we are certain the kingdom of God had not arrived by the time of Jesus' death. After Jesus' resurrection, during his forty days of instruction concerning the kingdom, the apostles asked the Lord when the kingdom would be restored. Jesus replied, saying: "*It is not for you to know the times or seasons, which the Father has put in his own power, But ye shall receive power, after the Holy Ghost is come upon you: and ye shall be witnesses . . .*"[18]

It is plain right up to the ascension that the apostles had no knowledge of an existing messianic kingdom. Jesus had told them when the kingdom would come, it would be announced by the coming of the power of the Holy Spirit. They were instructed in Acts 1:8 to wait in Jerusalem for this power. This indicates the kingdom was not present in the first chapter of Acts. In Acts 2 it is a different story. This chapter opens with the powerful outpouring of the Spirit. This spiritual display was explained by the apostles and followed by Peter's great sermon in which he stated, "*God hath made this same Jesus, whom ye have crucified, both Lord and Christ.*" This evoked an immediate question from his audience, pleading: "*What shall we do?*" Peter then announced to those present God's terms for their sins to be forgiven. Threethousand of the greater assemblage that had convened at the Temple for Pentecost believed the apostle's preaching and were baptized. Immediately they were added to the church by God himself.[19] Since God makes no mistakes, all those being saved daily are saved when they respond to the identical terms which Peter announced on that great day. When they shouted, "*What must we do?*" Peter answered: "*Repent, and be baptized everyone of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins, and ye shall receive the gift of the Holy Spirit*" (Ac. 2:38).

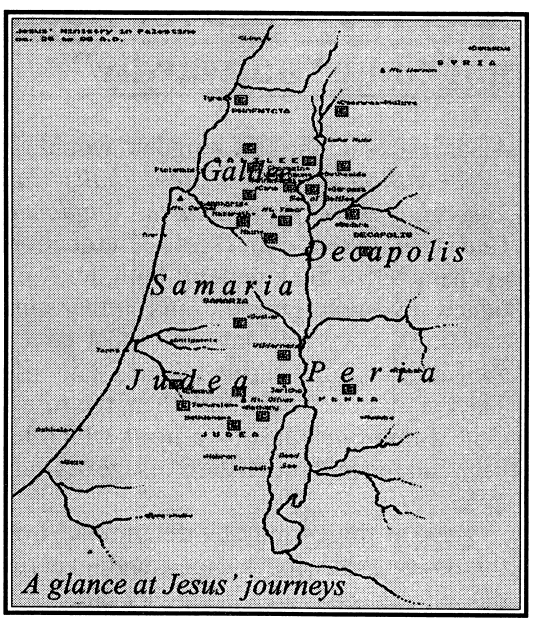
Following this, in Acts 2:47, Luke said God added to the church those *"such as should be saved."* From this moment forward there are repeated references to the presence of the new church/kingdom. All the essential things necessary for the coming kingdom had been fulfilled in the death of Christ. The redeeming blood had been shed, the Holy Spirit had come and Christ had returned to heaven to reign on David's throne. (Note Dan.7:13-14, Col. 1:13-14; Heb. 12:28 and Rev. 1:9.)

C. The kingdom came on the first Pentecost after Jesus' resurrection and ascension

The above headline is in keeping with the prophecy of Daniel 7:13 where the Son of Man is seen returning to God to receive his kingdom. This was fulfilled when Jesus ascended back to his Father after having finished his work on earth. His completed work of subduing Satan made it possible to free all the Devil's captives from the kingdom of darkness. This was done through the sanctifying process of Christ's blood which enabled all believers to be admitted to the kingdom of God. Upon his return for the kingdom, Jesus became Lord, Christ and King and was given preeminence over all things and made the head of the body of Christ, the church (Col. 1:18). He establishes his rule in the throne room of believers' hearts. The establishment of the church/ kingdom was confirmed by the outpouring of the Holy Spirit. Peter affirmed this when he said that what they were experiencing was a fulfillment of Joel's prophecy to pour out his spirit upon all flesh (Ac. 2:16 cf. Jo. 2:28). Those who had received John's baptism, along with those obeying Jesus' and the apostles' preaching under the limited commission (See Lu. 10:1 and Jno. 4:1-2), became the initial citizens of the kingdom at 9:00 o'clock on that first day of the week. At the third hour (9:00 A.M.) when the Spirit arrived, the kingdom came in a demonstration of power. This fulfilled the promise of Jesus in Acts 1:6-8. The ministries of both John the Baptist and Jesus prepared a body of penitent believers who were waiting for the coming of the Spirit of God to empower them. This was much like the newly formed body of Adam in Eden that waited for the inbreathing of the breath of God to make him a living organism.[20]

It is imperative that we understand what is meant by the kingdom of heaven in the New Testament. We must not allow ourselves to form opinions rooted in theological theories taught all over the world. Little unity in Christendom exists on this subject. It is dangerous to rely upon the popularity of a church, a faddish doctrine, or a teacher's charisma as a basis for one's Christian faith. Inspired scripture is the only valid criteria for saving faith. This always calls for a diligent personal investigation of the word of God to learn the truth.[21]

The ministries of both John the Baptist and Jesus prepared a body of penitent believers who were waiting for the coming of the Spirit of God to empower them. This was much like the newly formed body of Adam in Eden that waited for the inbreathing of the breath of God to make him a living soul.



A glance at Jesus' journeys

Paul said the Jews stumbled at the preaching of Jesus. This was like rejecting the foundation stone in a great building.[22] How could they miss such a crucial part of the spiritual building? And why is there so much misunderstanding about this to this day? Note the following:

A. The kingdom would come inwardly by faith.

Jesus' preaching was in opposition with the popular conception that the kingdom would be a material visible power. The Jews believed the Deliverer would reestablish David's throne, literally and materially in Jerusalem. Jesus, however, taught clearly the kingdom was not of this world and that it would not come by the use of force. The new order would be established by faith within one's heart, personal conviction of sins, and walking in the truth. Revolutionary as this may have seemed to some, it should have been better understood, for six hundred years before Jesus, the prophet Habakkuk declared: "*the just shall live by faith.*"[23]

B. The kingdom would not come "outwardly"

Also, Jesus said the new kingdom would not "*come with observation: neither, shall ye say, lo here!, lo there! for behold, the kingdom of God is within you*" (Lu. 17:21). The qualities to characterize the kingdom: faith, love, patience, joy and forgiveness, and similar spiritual traits, were internal values that govern the nature of fruit bearing in one's daily life. The kingdom is essentially, then, the rule of God within one's heart—a heart which has been converted through the message of God's love.

Several things may be determined from this passage showing that the kingdom or rule of God exists within a person's heart.

It was specifically said the kingdom would not come outwardly, that is, "with observation." Think what this means! It means the kingdom would exist only in a spiritual sense. This should have prevented any idea of a material kingdom. However, thousands still believe this is to be the nature of Christ's rule, regardless of the statement by Jesus in Luke 17:21.

Some tried to force Jesus to establish a kingdom and reign on earth but when he rejected the idea, they would have no more to do with him: "*From that time many of his disciples went back, and walked no more with him*" *(John 6:15; 66).* Many still lust for a visible earthly kingdom.

The avid desire for Christ to yet establish a "visual" earthly kingdom makes many souls extremely vulnerable to the same proposal made to Christ by Satan in the temptation. Satan's attempt to get Jesus to turn stones to bread was an attack on the foundation principle on which the kingdom was to rest: *self denial for the advancement of the kingdom.* Inherent in Satan's suggestion to Jesus was the use of his newly acquired power to satisfy the flesh and thereby gain the following of the world. However, Christians are to walk by faith and not fulfill the lusts of the flesh. As previously noted, this was a proposition the devil cast before our Lord which he resoundingly rejected.[24]

Paul denounced the idea of an external kingdom. He condemned the erroneous idea of a material kingdom in his letter to the Romans, writing them: "*For the kingdom of God is not meat and drink: but righteousness, and peace and joy in the Holy Ghost.*"[25] An expressed danger lies in a tendency to misunderstand the nature of the kingdom of God, especially in those aspects where there is an overlapping of both the spiritual and material blessings. By seeking the kingdom first, one can also reap a harvest of material blessings but whoever chooses to live by the sword, Jesus says, "*shall die by the sword*" (See Matt. 6:33ff.). But on the other hand, to choose to live a peaceful spiritual life means

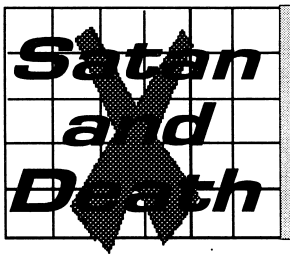
one will increase the number of his earthly years, etc. Spiritual life does not come by the wielding of material weapons. It comes by the man of sin being slain by the sword of the Spirit (Heb. 4:12). Even though material profit may come as serendipities to a life of godliness, a Christian does not make those things *first* in his life. That which is sought first is the blessing of eternal life. He then trusts that God will adequately supply his material needs (Matt. 6:33). The Christian considers himself a pilgrim in this word and that his citizenship is in heaven. The only material wealth he needs is to supply him on his journey of passing through this life.[26]

C. Miracles were not guaranteed for "love offerings"

Miracles of healing were performed by the high act of God's wonderful grace. However, true to Peter's prophecy in II Peter 2:2, the merchandising of pseudo miracles in the name of Jesus by covetous evangelists has abounded. Even though Simon the Sorcerer was severely rebuked by the apostle Peter in Acts 8 for seeking to commercialize the power of the Holy Spirit, this sin persists among modern Simons. Miracles are billboarded before the poor and desperate to solicit "love offerings." This money supports the most lavish life styles of the extremely covetous "faith healing" evangelists. The reason this ugliness persists is because covetousness can be hidden so easily beneath the pious motive of healing the sick. False prophets advertise their miracles in Jesus' name, selling them for profit like cheap trifles in a flea market. Like the Temple priests of John 2, these miracle hucksters would make the Father's house a den of thieves. Selling miracles via the media has proved to be tremendously lucrative. The satellite TV audience is huge and vulnerable as it is composed of teaming millions of sincere but ignorant souls of God's word as well as the desperate and terminally ill who would gladly pay for any hope at all. The covetous pulpiteers prey on those who are deeply in debt and needing money badly to meet pressing bills. There are those in this vast audience who are looking for a quick fix for failing marriages and miraculous narcotic cures, promising for love offerings a miracle will be forthcoming that will end their ills. All these pitiful circumstances, plus the availability and anonymity that mail order religion offers, provide a fertile field for the diabolical miracle hawkers—plus, *the business is tax free!*

The wilderness temptations revealed Satan's knowledge of the power of the spectacular over the thrill seekers. Buried deep within the lusts of man is the desire to find a quick fix for his critical problems. Besides, many people find the mysterious extremely entertaining. Many love the sensational and to stand agape at the incredible displayed before their eyes. For some, it gives access to an easy, lazy religion that can purchase God's blessings for an offering while remaining aloof from church membership responsibilities. This atmosphere is close akin to metaphysics in which one can be amused with fancied new wisdom and a source of mystical power which is as old as Gnosticism and eastern mysticism dating back to the first and second centuries. Jesus refused this clever trap that Satan placed before him during the wilderness temptations. We must be constantly on guard against those who would merchandise miracles, because this Satanic method to dazzle with the spectacular is still extremely popular. It is easy to deceive the hopeless by phony miracles in which the merchandising faith healer abounds.[27]

According to Jeremiah, the New Covenant would usher in the new spiritual age in which God's will would be written upon the heart of all believers. This would make worship universally possible because the new Temple is located in the believer's heart. Like the old tabernacle, it is portable and not stationary like the Temple in Jerusalem. It is useless, therefore, to look for a material throne of God's kingdom either at an altar in Jerusalem or in a Samaritan mountain.[28]



JOHN'S LOVELY PASSAGE: *"GOD SO LOVED THE WORLD, THAT HE GAVE HIS ONLY BEGOTTEN SON, THAT WHOSOEVER BELIEVETH IN HIM SHOULD NOT PERISH, BUT HAVE EVERLASTING LIFE,"* STILL REMAINS THE UNIVERSAL HOPE OF MANKIND.

D. Jesus viewed Satan as the enemy, not Caesar

The above headline is no endorsement of Caesar. It is declaring that Caesar was not the source of evil. Many of the Jews of Jesus' day became so inflamed against Rome they formed a group of avengers known as the Sicarii, a fanatical wing of the Pharisees also known as the Zealots or Nationalists. The Zealots looked upon every insignia of Rome as a hated symbol of the presence of an oppressive foreign power. They swore themselves to exterminate the burdensome yoke of Rome by any possible means.

Some believe Judas held secret membership in this group and hopefully looked to Jesus for their deliverance.[29] Jesus, however, spoke of the coming of the kingdom as being governed by a rule of peace. At Jesus' arrest, Peter used the sword in an effort to protect him, but was instructed by him to put it away.[30] This poses no contradiction to Jesus' statement that he came "not to bring peace but a sword" (Matt. 10:34); for in this instance Jesus was referring to divisions and variances which would arise between believers and nonbelievers. Jesus knew the real enemy to be overthrown was Satan who had enthroned himself in man's heart. What had to be conquered was the power of darkness, not any earthly emperor. Years later, Paul expressed it this way: "*For we wrestle not against flesh and blood, but against principalities, and powers, against rulers of darkness in high places.*"[31]

Jesus had come to the strong man's house to bind him and spoil his goods.[32] It is apparent the strong man is Satan and his house is the heart of sinful man. Jesus had come to free those captured hearts that had surrendered to Satan and allowed sin to reign in their lives.[33]

It was not Caesar's legions Jesus came to defeat, but the loosing of Satan's shackles.[34] The coming of the kingdom of God into one's heart would happen only when a person renounced his stubborn will and confessed Jesus as the new Lord of his life. Consequently, the kingdom would not be a local or national occurrence; it would happen by surrendering to the universal sovereignty of God and being made free from the bondage of sin (Rom. 6:17-18).

It was impossible for the Jew to think of God favoring any person other than a Hebrew. The problem of religious nationalism remains. John's lovely passage: "*God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life,*" still remains the universal hope of mankind.[35]

There were many Jews looking into the distant future for a type of the old Davidic throne to be reestablished in Jerusalem. Consequently, they were blinded to the true spiritual nature of the kingdom of heaven—even when it appeared openly before their eyes. It took, then and now, a new birth of the Spirit in order for one to "see" the kingdom of God (John 3:3). The new birth purifies the heart by faith (Acts 15:9). Jesus referred to this in the beatitudes in Matthew 5:8: "*blessed are the pure in heart for they shall see God.*"

In ignorance, the Jews sacrificed their own promised messianic Deliverer for themselves and the world. The lamb they judged unclean was in Peter's language, "*a lamb without blemish.*"[36] All sacrifices offered in the Old Testament pointed toward this one perfect sacrifice, yet they stumbled at it when it came, and as Jesus said, were guilty

of substituting sacrifices for mercy.[37] But it is frightening to think today one can allow the items of worship—singing, prayer, Bible study, giving of our means and the Lord's Supper—to become so formal and routine they can lose their spiritual significance. Such prevents spiritual growth and prevents true "watchfulness" for the Lord's return.

Great churches may work hard, but mere "busy work" programs organized in a congregation without specific objectives cannot substitute for disciplined devotion during regularly attended Bible studies and worship services. One must be sure that the motive underlying Bible reading is always pure. Merely "reading through" a designated number of chapters a day just to finish reading the Bible in a specified time, may be helpful in providing discipline for the task, but care must be taken that it does not become an end within itself.

"A scripture a day to keep the devil away" is no charm against Satan. Such "mechanical reading" without proper division of God's word and meditative study for self application, provides no more guarantee for spiritual growth than reading through a Physics book would educate one in engineering.

Blinded by tradition and prejudice, many Jews were sufficiently weakened in faith so that they were unable to discern the true Spirit of the God of heaven. Even when he appeared performing the wondrous deeds of mercy that only God could do, they refused to believe. Their performance of the Temple services—the very things that should have caused them to recognize Jesus—were performed in such a perfunctory manner that it only increased their spiritual darkness. This darkness proscribed the merciful acts of God on, of all days, the Sabbath day of the Lord.[38] So they sought to destroy Jesus for breaking the Sabbath, when in deep Spirit he was keeping the Sabbath in its most sublime manner. How black is that mental darkness which stubbornly refuses to acknowledge obvious acts of mercy and attributes them to Satan.

To avoid such a pitfall, ***one must eliminate any tendency to maintain creeds and traditions of men and give themselves wholly to the justification of God's Word.***[39] Creeds persist espousing the future coming of the kingdom of God even though the kingdom has been present since Pentecost in Acts 2 when 3,000 were first added to the church/kingdom.[40]

Since then, through faith in the King millions have been translated into the kingdom upon renouncing the rule of Satan in their hearts and submitting to the terms of the Gospel. Paul wrote the Colossian brethren: He *"hath delivered us from the power of darkness, and hath translated us into the kingdom of his dear Son."*[41]

The Christians at Colossae were in the kingdom of God, and the opportunity for entering it has been available for all believers since the first century. Jesus preached that some of those alive during his ministry would live to see the kingdom come with power.[42] If it has never come, there must be someone, somewhere, yet alive who is two thousand years old!

IV. OTHER FEATURES OF THE CHURCH/KINGDOM

A. It is a fellowship of the redeemed

The New Testament calls redeemed people the "ekklesia" of God.[43] This Greek word means the "called out." It means those who have been separated from sin by the grace of God and who constitute his kingdom.

This was made possible because the have have been washed from their sins in the blood of Jesus and sanctified in his church[44]

Being freed from sin by responding to the proclamation to "repent and be baptized" for the remission of sins, these were added to the ekklesia, or church.[45]

A salvation which came uniquely to someone permitting that individual to remain isolated from the broad spectrum of the family of God without any responsibility to save the lost, and without subjection to the oversight of a local eldership when the eldership was available, is wholly unknown in the New Testament.[46]

Christ is the sole head of his body, the church.[47] Jesus knew an individual could not wage his own private war against Satan. He is far too powerful for this. All Christians need the tremendous power found in the good fellowship of the local church to help develop and keep a sensitive conscience. Many victories have been won because the essential courage needed to overcome heated struggles was gained through the combined spiritual energies and prayers of the saints. A felt unity and the "unfeigned love of the brethren" are strong factors in overcoming the onslaughts of evil. God's people need the strength and encouragement that can only be received from a Christian fellowship dedicated to the "common salvation." We need the power that comes from the kind of fellowship experienced by those "saints in Caesar's household." How utterly important it is in our struggle for spiritual survival to maintain "*the unity of the spirit in the bond of peace.*"[48]

B. The church/kingdom is universal in scope

Each reborn soul responding to the grace of God is added to the fellowship of the redeemed. This community of "faith people" is not confined to the borders of any nation. The citizens of the Lord's kingdom are called by Christ the "salt of the earth," and "the light of the world."[49] Luke emphasizes the vast borders of the church/kingdom when he states: "*They shall come from the east, and from the west, and from the north, and from the south, and shall sit down in the kingdom of God.*"[50] Knowing this, it is a mutiny against God to ignore the Great Commission which commands all Christians to "*Go ye into all the world, and preach the gospel to every creature. He that believeth and is baptized shall be saved; but he that believeth not shall be damned.*"[51] It is the sacred responsibility of every Christian to work together under God to make this passage come true in every generation.

C. We await the consummation of all things

Even though it has been possible to enter the church/kingdom since the first century, we still await its fullness and its being offered up unto God by Jesus in the last day.[52] At his return, our Lord will say, "*Come ye blessed of my Father, inherit the kingdom.*"[53] And on that day, praise God, the exhausting struggle will be forever over. The day is coming when "*the kingdoms of this earth shall become the kingdoms of our Lord and of his Christ; and he shall reign forever and ever.*"[54] We must understand the church/ kingdom has both come and is still coming. We are "receiving a kingdom," is emphatic language in the book of Hebrews. However, we will only enter into *its fullness of blessings* at the second advent of our Lord (Heb. 12:28). By the grace of God the imperfect creature shall be made fully perfect by him who is perfect. This molding of perfection begins in this life with the Christian experience but shall only be consummated at his coming. The last enemy is yet to be destroyed. We will then dwell together in a perfected spiritual existence for ever and ever (Rev. 11:22).

All Christians need the tremendous power found in the good fellowship of the local church to help develop and keep a sensitive conscience.

References

1. Mark 1:15
2. Malachi 3:1
3. Consult D. S. Russell's *The Jews from Alexander to Herod*, published by Oxford University Press, Chapter XIV.
4. Exodus 19:5-6; 19:43-46
5. Jeremiah 11:31
6. Isaiah 1:2
7. Daniel 1
8. Matthew 1
9. Read Mack Craig's lecture on The Birth of Christ, in Lubbock Christian College Lectures: *Great Moments with Christ*, 1974.
10. Refer to William Barclay's *The Mind of Christ,* Harper and Row, 1960, Chapter 8.
11. Luke 10
12. Acts 1:1-8
13. Matthew 1:2
14. Matthew 3:11
15. Matthew 11:11
16. Matthew 6:10
17. Mark 15:43
18. Acts 1:6-8
19. Acts 2:47
20. Genesis 1:7
21. II Timothy 2:15; Jno. 14:6; Jno. 8:32
22. Romans 9:32-33
23. Habakkuk 1:4
24. Matthew 1:3
25. Romans 14:17
26. Matthew 6:33
27. Note II Thessalonians 1:9-12
28. Jeremiah 11:31; John 4:20-24
29. William Barclay, *Op. cit.*, p. 205
30. John 18:10-11; 16
31. Ephesians 6:12
32. Matthew 12:29
33. Romans 6:16
34. Luke 14:18
35. John 1:16
36. I Peter 1:18-19
37. Matthew 9:13; 12:7
38. Read John 9
39. Matthew 15:8-9
40. Acts 2
41. Colossians 1:13-14
42. Mark 9:1

43. I Corinthians 1:1
44. Acts 22:16; Ephesians 1:7; Acts 20:28
45. I Timothy. 1:15; Acts 2:38-47
46. Acts 2:41-43; Hebrews 13:7, 17; Jude 3
47. Colossians 1:18; Ephesians 1:22-23
48. Philippians. 1:42; Ephesians 1:3-16
49. Matthew 1:13ff.
50. Luke 13:29
51. Mark 16:15-16; Matthew 18:18-20
52. I Corinthians 15:24
53. Matthew 15:34
54. Revelation 11:15

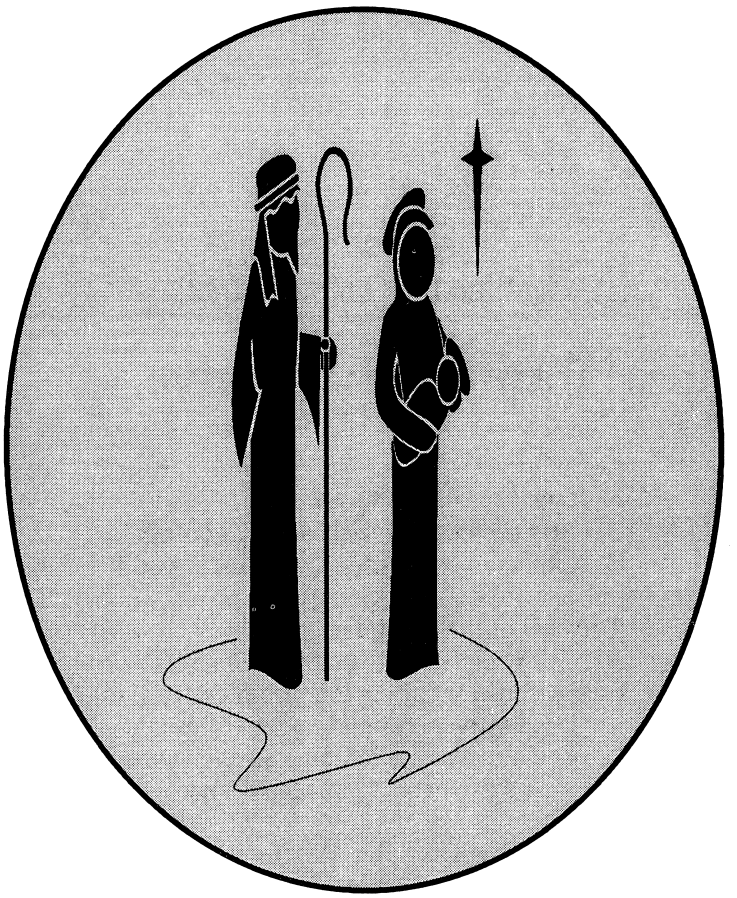
Supplementary Readings

Bales, James D., *The Kingdom Prophesied and Established* (Austin, Texas: Firm Foundation Publishing House, 1957)
Barclay, William, *The Mind of Jesus* (New York and Evanston: Harper and Row, 1961)
Russell, D.S., *The Jews From Alexander to Herod.* (The New Clarendon Bible: Old Testament, Vol. V, Oxford University Press, 1967)
Lubbock Christian College Lectures: *Great Moments With Christ.* (Austin, Texas: Firm Foundation Publishing House, 1974)

Questions for Chapter Seven

Discuss the following in detail:

1. The apocalyptic intensity which preceded the establishment of the kingdom.
2. The coming of the kingdom of heaven.
3. Why could the kingdom not have come during John the Baptist's or Jesus' ministry.
4. The nature of the kingdom of heaven.
5. The merchandising of miracles.
6. The real enemy of the kingdom of God, according to Jesus.



Seven Services Toward All Men

1. Love all men (I Thess. 3:12)
2. Be patient with all men (I Thess. 5:14)
3. Live peaceably with all men (Rom. 12:18)
4. Provide things honest in the sight of all men (Rom. 12:17)
5. Be gentle to all men (2 Tim. 2:24)
6. Let your moderation be known to all men (Phil. 4:5)
7. Do good unto all men (Gal. 6:10)

Outline for Chapter Eight

Training the Twelve

I. Testimony Regarding the Youthful Ministry of Jesus
   A. Jesus appealed to the young
   B. Early sketches of Jesus appear youthful
   C. Authors have written about Jesus' youth

II. The Call of the Disciples
   A. The disciples were not social misfits
   B. Reasons for calling the disciples
      1. They were called to be with Jesus
      2. They were called for a specialized education
      3. A systematic approach was needed

III. Selecting His Disciples
   A. Viewing the disciples
      1. Andrew the personal worker
      2. Peter the natural leader
      3. James and John the sons of thunder
      4. Thomas, who demanded more evidence
      5. Matthew the converted publican
      6. Philip the inquirer
      7. Simon the Zealot
      8. The remaining apostles

IV. How Jesus Selected the Apostles
   A. They needed Jesus and Jesus needed them

IS YOUTHFUL MINISTRY

Chapter Eight

Training the Twelve

Matthew 10:5-20, 32-42; Mark 3:13-19; 10:35-45; Luke 5:1-11

Day by day, oh Master make me
With that blessed life of Thine,
Day by day, oh Lord, enfold me
With thy mighty grace divine.
Day by day, oh saviour, take me
For thy servant, willing, free,
Day by day, oh Master make me
All that Thou wouldst have me be.
Day by day, oh Saviour, keep me
Just abiding in Thy love,
Simply trusting and obeying,
Looking unto Thee above.
—A.G. Fisher

I. TESTIMONY REGARDING THE YOUTHFUL MINISTRY OF JESUS

A. Jesus appealed to the young

Luke says Jesus was about thirty years old when he was baptized and began calling his disciples (Luke 3:23). While this may not be regarded as extremely young, it is still in the glow of youth for such a sobering and momentous task. Our national constitution forbids one from serving as president under thirty-five years of age.

Thirty is a good age to identify with youth, especially if one has the charisma of leadership. Those in their twenties (the age range of most of the disciples) could be easily attracted to someone slightly their senior as Jesus. Also, it helped tremendously to have the endorsement of John the Baptist who was slightly older than Jesus. It can be determined by the record of their births that John was only six months older than his cousin. Speaking of the coming Messiah, the Psalmist sang . . .

> *In the beauty from the womb of the morning: thou hast the dew of thy youth* (Psa. 110:3).

This hymn was sung by Israel in anticipation of a Deliverer who would begin his work in Israel in the early morning of his years. Jesus quoted from this hymn in reference to himself in Matthew 22:44. As the writer of

Ecclesiastes admonishes us all, Jesus too, remembered the Creator in the days of his youth. (See Ecclesiastes 12:1)

B. Early sketches of Jesus appear youthful

While we have no original painting of Jesus or sculpture of his likeness, later, when the church met underground in Rome, they etched youthful likenesses of the Man from Galilee upon the walls of the catacombs. Oral tradition must have been the basis for carving these figures of Jesus who was depicted as a young shepherd tending his sheep.

C. Authors have written about Jesus' youth

The original version of Isaac Watt's magnificent hymn of the cross of Jesus portrays the youthful theme of Jesus with these lines:

> When I survey the wondrous cross,
> Where the young Prince of Glory died.

Words and phrases allude to the disciples' youth. Terms used by Jesus when addressing the disciples reflect their young age. This does not discount the worth of experience and age in ordinary people. Some of the wisest people have been those in their latter years of service who were seasoned with experience and able to offer sober counseling from the resources of a full life. However, Jesus was different in that he was divine.

James S. Stewart, in his inimitable style, pens the following words about this:

> *And no one has ever understood the heart of youth in its gaiety and gallantry and generosity and hope, its sudden loneliness, haunting dreams, hidden conflicts and strong temptations, no one has understood it all nearly so well as Jesus. And no one has realized more clearly than Jesus did that the adolescent years of life, when strange dormant thoughts are stirring and the whole world begins to unfold, are God's best chance with the soul. When Jesus and youth came together, deep calls to the deep.*
>
> *There is one immediate, instinctive feeling of kinship, and everything that is fine and noble and pure in youth bows down in admiration and adoration before him.*[1]

He had a wisdom from above and was able to nourish the disciples as *teknia* (Jno. 13:33) and *paidia, (Jno. 21:5)* two Greek words meaning "children" and "my dear children." The use of these words infer that the disciples were young. Moffatt lends credence to this youthful theme by translating the Greek word *pardia* as "lads"

Paul infers in I Corinthians 15:6 that the disciples were young. About twenty-seven years after the resurrection of Jesus, the apostle Paul mentions something which infers many of Jesus' early disciples were from among the young people. In I Cor. 15:6, Paul said:

> *He was seen of Cephas and the twelve: After that, he was seen of above five hundred brethren at once; of whom the greater part remain unto this present.*[2]

Adding three years of ministry to the twenty-seven elapsed years since Jesus was crucified, totals thirty. Not many people lived past sixty years in the first century era, if that long. This heavily implies the "greater part" that remained alive at the time of Paul's letter to the Corinthians (ca. 57. A.D.) had to be called no later than 30 years old—some perhaps as early as their teens.

The immediacy and ease at which they seem to be able to drop all things to follow Jesus indicates the youth of the early dis-

ciples. The older generation is usually settled into occupations and find it difficult to change life's vocation at a moments notice. However, many of the disciples such as James and John left their occupation immediately at their first calling of Jesus. James' and John's father, Zebedee, was still alive and apparently hard working at commercial fishing. This would indicate James and John were young. Also, the fact that their mother was seeking the advancement of her sons' careers points to the same fact (Matt. 20:20ff). Saul of Tarsus was a young Jewish rabbinical student in Jerusalem and Timothy was a young disciple who was admonished by his teacher, the apostle Paul, to let no man despise his youth. Paul also called Titus his son in the faith. All such references indicate the early kingdom was populated with a large number of young adults.

II. THE CALL OF THE DISCIPLES

A. The disciples were not social misfits

One should not classify these young disciples with modern youthful misfits or merely as "the young rebels" of their day. A few modern special interest groups who have advocated violence to bring change have likened themselves to Jesus and his disciples. They have no common ground with them. Jesus came to establish a rule of peace in the hearts of people, not to create anarchy and civil strife. Peter and others admonished the early Christians to honor and submit to the civil authorities (I Pet. 2:13ff).

Jesus posed no threat to any good civil ruler. His kingdom was not of this world, neither were his servants to fight. It is true some of the most bloody conflicts in history have been fought in the name of Christ but those were every whit as wrong as Peter in Gethsemane when he drew his sword to oppose those who arrested Jesus. If someone were to object on the basis that Jesus said he came to bring a sword and not peace, it should be remembered this sword is the sword of persecution wielded by those who hate the light. The violence that erupted in communities when the church arrived on the scene was due to unrighteous people resisting righteousness because it threatened their way of life. Some had ill-gotten gains and felt Christians must be hushed to keep them.

B. Reasons for calling the disciples

1. *The disciples were called to be with Jesus.*

Jesus was undertaking a huge task which would lead him through "the valley of the shadow of death." Whoever has experienced acute loneliness knows the pain it can inflict. Why do prisons discipline with solitary confinement? There is something about the soul that craves friendship. The humanity of Jesus needed friends, as do we, to face the great trying moments of crisis in our lives. The Scriptures say plainly Jesus called his disciples to be with him and that he addressed them as friends (Mk. 3:14; Jno. 15:15).

> And he ordained twelve, that **they should be with him,** and that he might send them forth to preach.
> —Mark 3:14

2. They were called for a specialized education.

The disciples had many things to learn about the new nature of the kingdom. They held preconceived ideas which must be removed. They thought the kingdom would be earthly, that the Messiah would overthrow the existing government, then reestablish the throne of David and reign from Jerusalem. They thought, also, they could be appointed an office of high position in the kingdom. They became convinced early that Jesus was the Messiah, but had not the foggiest idea of his true deity. A full conception of Jesus' true identity would take both training and time, including their witnessing Jesus' resurrection.

3. A systematic approach was needed.

If the kingdom was to take root as a mustard seed and grow into universal dimensions, there had to be a systematic approach. Someone must be both commissioned by the authority of God and then assume this responsibility. The fledgling church must be left in the hands of those whose specific responsibility would be to nurture and discipline the new Christians until they were fully organized and firmly grounded in the faith.

III. SELECTING HIS DISCIPLES

A. Viewing the disciples

It seems obvious, at least in some of the Gospel accounts, that a number of the disciples responded almost immediately to the call of Jesus for discipleship. On the surface, there appear to be some conflicts in the accounts of their calling.[3] However, when one accepts the premise that the response *to full-fledged discipleship* (where the disciples left their families and businesses), was arrived at by degrees through a graduating process of a few months, the difficulties are easily resolved. On this topic a writer says:

> *Indeed, there were probably three stages on the road to full apostleship. To begin with, they were simply friends, remaining in their own homes and at their various secular activities, but seeing him and speaking with him from time to time. The second stage came with the sundering of home ties and the relinquishing of ordinary occupations. Finally, there came the day when from the main body of the followers who had gathered round him, twelve were set apart for the closest intimacy and the most work . . . The apparent duplicating of the Gospels of the accounts of the calling of the disciples has been felt to be a problem, but the above explanation provides a solution. Thus, for example, when we find one account of Peter's call in John 1:42, another quite different account in Luke 5:10-11, and still another in Mark 3:13-16, it is not necessary to say that only one of these narratives can be authentic and that the others must be eliminated. The fact is that they all have a true place in the story. For each represents a distinct stage in Peter's progress from his earliest acquaintance with Jesus to his full surrender. It was really a threefold call, first to apostleship, then the call following, and finally the call to full ministry of apostleship. . . .*[4]

"Let no man despise thy youth . . ."
—I Tim. 4:12—

1. Andrew the personal worker.

Andrew must have been a fine man with a lovely personality. He was the brother of Simon Peter who overshadows him in many ways. In other ways, Andrew has a splendid character unmatched. According to John, he was from Bethsaida of Galilee, only a short distance east from the city of Capernaum on the northern shore of the Sea of Galilee. He shared the occupation of fisherman with his brother Simon in whose home he dwelt. Andrew became a disciple of John the Baptist before becoming acquainted with Jesus. It was after hearing John testify to Jesus' Messiahship and to his being the Lamb of God, that he switched his discipleship to Jesus. Being quickly convinced by the evidence that Jesus was the Messiah, Andrew immediately found Peter and persuaded him to come hear the man whom he believed to be the Messiah.

Because Andrew is the first mentioned in the Bible as bringing others to Christ, he has won for himself the immortal reputation of being the first Christian missionary. Although not mentioned as often as some of the other disciples, each of the three times he is mentioned it is in association with bringing someone to Christ; on the first occasion it was Peter, the second, a young lad, and on the third it was a group of Greeks who desired to see the Master (Jno. 12:20). *Andrew* is from a Greek word meaning brave or masculine. In those days names were given to describe a person's personality. Frequently, upon discovering a name did not fit too well, a new more appropriate one was given.

If Andrew had been anything like some other men, he would have found it impossible to work in a supporting roll in the Kingdom. He is frequently mentioned as, Andrew, *Simon Peter's brother.* Because of the love he had for his brother, Andrew could manage this situation without any difficulty. However, it is frequently very chaffing to many to be cast in the shadow of another's intelligence and achievements. Clovis Chappell, author of many sermon books, has a sermon based on the bigness of Andrew's character entitled, "The Art of Playing Second Fiddle."[5] Some people simply cannot content themselves with being second in anything. To these, winning the ball game is not nearly so important as their desire to be the pitcher, the star attraction. If they play on the team, they must pitch or not join in the game. This is true even though others may be more qualified for the position than themselves. But, obviously, all cannot be the pitcher.

There must be supporting players in the game, even when it falls their lot to make others seem more beautiful and useful than themselves. To always enhance the appearance of others, without bearing any resentment, is true greatness. Andrew's role was made easy through the love he had for his brother. To Andrew belongs the beauty of bringing a man of great talent to Jesus. Without such deeds by such men as Andrew, history would be robbed of the service of the workers who find, and push ahead of themselves, men capable of great achievements. Clovis Chappell remarked that Andrew did not mind playing second fiddle at all. He was content with being himself, and in this, his true greatness is second to none. The few scriptures that mention Andrew reflect how extremely busy this true evangelist was at bringing men to Jesus.[6] To bring someone else to Christ is still the glory of the Christian's calling. There is a tradition that says Andrew was crucified at Patrae in Achaia and during the two days he was alive on the cross, urged all those who passed by to believe in Jesus as the Messiah.[7]

Andrew is also seen asking Jesus to rebuke a man for casting out demons in Jesus' name because he was not keeping company with the Master and the twelve. Jesus answered him, saying: "Forbid him not." The man was evidently a Jew who believed in the superior power of Jesus' name over the demons. This man is not to be classed among those rebuked by John for preaching false doctrines (Lu. 9:49; I John 4).

2. Peter the natural leader.

Simon Peter became this apostle's full name when the Lord added "Peter" to his old name denoting a "rock personality" which he would eventually attain.[8] He was the son of a man named Jonah. He dwelt with his wife, mother-in-law and brother Andrew in the city of Bethsaida near Capernaum. Here he shared a fishing business with Andrew and Zebedee. Zebedee was the father of James and John who became apostles of Jesus. Interestingly, Bethsaida means "fisherman's home."

Peter first met Jesus in the vicinity of the shores of the Jordan River where John the Baptist was conducting his campaign of repentance. Jesus perceived that this man had tremendous potential for good in the kingdom through the means of the Gospel's grace. In view of this, he gave him a new name meaning "rock." Rock or stone is the meaning of the Greek word Petros, as well as the Aramaic word, Cephas.[9] Peter was not given the new name because he already possessed a rocklike character. To the contrary, in his early days Peter was more sand than rock. Jesus gave him the new name because he saw he could eventually become unyielding in character for good by submitting to the grace of God in Jesus. Occasionally, as in Matthew 18, he would revert to his old personality causing Jesus to address him by his old name. This was a stern but gentle warning from Jesus that he must not return to his old ways.

We love Peter because his weaknesses are common to all, making is easy for us to identify with his struggles in the flesh. In later life this apostle mentioned that he was also an elder in the church.[10] He must have been a wonderful overseer of souls who could offer wise counseling to Christians with weaknesses which he had experienced and overcome. Peter prevailed over his own weaknesses because he loved Jesus intensely. This would make him an exceptionally qualified elder in the Lord's church. At Jesus' arrest, where there is recorded the worst scar on Peter's discipleship, it is obvious that his actions were motivated by sheer frustration. It is obvious in the incident that he would have gladly died for Jesus, as John's Gospel reveals, but, being told by Jesus to put up his sword—that his Master must be arrested and taken before the murderous Caiphas where he did not stand a chance—left Peter *in complete frustration.* Here, in Gethsemane was the time for Jesus to act, to overthrow the corrupt powers, and the big fisherman was ready.

We should not be too quick to judge his actions, because we know that we too in times of stress and crisis have been every bit as guilty of denying Christ as Peter, at least in deed if not his words, when he said, "I know not the man" Peter went out and "wept bitterly" over his transgression.[11] All should be this sensitive to their sins. Peter was the first to recognize Jesus' true divinity at Caesarea Philippi and confessed him quickly. For doing so, he was given the responsibility and privilege of being the first to announce the divine terms of pardon to all who desire to be forgiven of their sins. He told those whom the Holy Spirit had convicted of sins through his preaching on the first Pentecost after Jesus' resurrection: "*Repent, and be baptized everyone of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins, and ye shall receive the gift of the Holy Ghost.*"[12] Jesus had given him these keys to the kingdom of heaven in Matthew 16, and added that which he bound on earth would be bound also in heaven. Therefore, all who desire salvation must follow this man's teaching to whom the keys of the kingdom have been given. It is not to be supposed that Peter alone received the keys, as all of the disciples were given the authority to preach the same gospel directly from Jesus. However, Peter was the leading character in Acts 2 where these keys were first used.

Peter was the chief spokesman for the group on numerous occasions. He is seen in the Synoptics frequently in conversation with Jesus, questioning, answering, and even presuming to guide the Master.[13] He, like many others, was like the little girl in the nursery rhyme "who had a little curl right in the middle of her forehead. When she was good, she was very, very good, and when she was bad, she was horrid." We should not be so critical of Peter, but rather identify with him.

Although he had many weaknesses that caused him a great many problems, he may be observed as a spiritual giant in the Book of Acts bravely standing for the truth at the cost of severe physical abuse and constant threats from the Jews.[14]

The materialistic multitudes began to vaporize. Jesus accused them of following him only for the "bread that perishes" rather than for the bread that endured unto eternal life. This prompted our Lord to question the disciples, saying: "Will ye also go away?" It was Peter who trustingly answered, *"Lord, to whom shall we go? You have the words of eternal life."*[15] But leadership qualities such as Peter's can have their negative effects as well. After Golgotha, when the disciples had gathered together to share their mutual disappointment, it was Peter who said, *"I go afishing."* Even though returning to their old professions was directly against the instructions of Jesus, the other disciples went along with Peter, saying: *"We also go with thee."*[16]

The paradoxes in Peter's life glare at us from the text. There he is, at Caesarea Philippi, when for joy he gallantly made the good confession and was blessed of Jesus. Then, later in the shadows on the night of his trial, the same man denied his Lord with an oath.[17] It is also quite easy to identify with Peter because he illustrates the war of tensions that occurs within each of us. We usually know better than the way we act, but we do not always do better. Paul eloquently expresses this in Romans 7. However, Peter was truly penitent over his denial of Jesus and confessed over and over his love for his Lord.[18] Can we, like Peter, weep with bitter tears over the many times we, through doubt, fears, and confusion, have outright denied the Master in our lives? Thanks be unto God for a patient, merciful, and forgiving Saviour! Jesus knows what is within man. Although he referred to Simon as Satan in Matt. 16:23, he knew that the clay in Peter's personality had possibility for perfection. He finally attained the solid "rock faith" personality Jesus knew he could eventually become. Peter became one of the first stones to be laid in the foundation of New Jerusalem (I Pet. 2:4; Rev. 2:14)

3. James and John, the sons of thunder.

The sons of Zebedee were men of passion and zeal. Their mother, Salome, may have been the sister of Mary, the mother of Jesus.[18] Both sons, along with their mother, shared the traditional belief that the "kingdom to come" would be an earthly nation having its throne in Jerusalem. They sought for themselves high positions within the government where each of them could sit to the right and left of Jesus.[19] The two young men seem to be of "like spirits." They are mentioned together in the lists of the apostles, and they probably journeyed together when they were sent out in couples to preach the upcoming kingdom. Perhaps it was because of their fiery temperament that Jesus called them Boanerges meaning, "the Sons of Thunder."[20] An example of their fiery passion is seen in Luke 9 where they were ready to call down fire from heaven upon the Samaritans for refusing to grant lodging for Jesus in their villages. They thought such inhospitality called for an immediate judgment of fire to be called down upon the Samaritans. Jesus rebuked them saying their mission was to save the lost, not destroy them. This reminder is still needed for many in the church. It is true Jesus will eventually judge the world by fire; but for the present he is the Saviour of the world.[21] Also, if the Samaritans were to be judged immediately without an opportunity for the grace of the gospel to be made known to them, the whole world would have to have been rejected because all have sinned and come short of the righteousness of God.[22]

James, John, and Peter were especially close to Jesus. They formed an inner circle of intimate friendship throughout his public ministry. They alone were with him on many special occasions that included such times as intimate praying, raising the dead, and the mountain top experience of the transfiguration.[23]

(a) *James: the first martyr.* Information is very meager about this James. He is men-

tioned only twice in the Gospels even though he must have been one of the most courageous and outspoken men in behalf of his Lord. *To him goes the eternal honor of being the very first Christian martyr.* When critical trials come, a Christian never knows whether he will be confined in prison, set free, or offered up in death. What an intense trust this demands. Paul exemplifies a beautiful attitude in Philippians 1:20-22 with these words: "*According to my earnest expectation and my hope, that in nothing I shall be ashamed, but that with all boldness, as always, so now also Christ shall be magnified in my body, whether it be by life, or by death. For me to live is Christ, and to die is gain, but if I live in the flesh, this is the fruit of my labor: yet what I shall choose I wot not.*"

In Acts 12, there are two great men in prison for preaching the truth. The church is concerned and praying for the safety of both men. The saints believed the church desperately needed the services of both men. Surely, they thought, both should be allowed to live long lives and accomplish great good by their faithful examples and powerful preaching. God in his infinite wisdom, however, knew what was best for the survival and growth of the early church. Evidently, the cause in Acts 12 needed a martyr as well as a living servant. The church prayed for the deliverance of both, yet trusted in God to intervene in the way that was best. The church must still sing in faith these words from the hymn by C. D. Tillman:

Ready to suffer grief or pain,
ready to stand the test;
Ready to stay at home and send,
others if he sees best.

The Christian may not always understand, but must be ready to serve. He must be ready to use the gift of an extended life as Peter was given, or to die if God needs a martyr for the moment as with James in Acts 12.

Herod Agrippa desired to "vex the church" and show delight to the Jews. James' untimely death may be the only reason that he did not gain as much distinction in the early church annals as his brother John.

James died first for the faith.

John was banished to Patmos but finally freed and served in Ephesus to a ripe old age.

—Eusebius

(b) *John: the beloved disciple.* In addition to what has already been said about John in the above discussion concerning his brother, there are a few things that should be added. He was always mentioned near the top when a list of the apostles was given. He was mentioned as part of a close circle of friends composed of his brother James, Peter and Andrew. These were closely associated with Jesus on several initimate occasions[25] such as the healing of Peter's mother-in-law and at a special teaching session concerning the future of the Temple.[26]

John was second only to the Apostle Paul in the number of Books he has written in the New Testament. He has five books to his credit. Although John suffered much for his Master, he lived a long joyful life in the Kingdom. In John we observe love and tenderness along with a humility seen at its very best in the Christian life. It was to John that the dying Saviour committed the care of his mother.[28]

Even though John is identified as that "disciple whom Jesus loved," there was still a limit to his patience. There is the moment in Mark 9:38 where he rebuked an unknown exorcist. His worst flare-up seems to have been in Mark 9:54 where he suggests that a Samaritan village should be burned for refusing to show hospitality to Jesus. Eager for her two sons to have recognition in the new kingdom, Salome urged Jesus to grant them chief seats in the new order. Jesus did not rebuke them for this but simply stated that such positions would not be merely handed out. Such recognition was not his to give, he said, as such came from the Father and given

only to those who proved themselves able to undergo, like himself, a fiery baptism of suffering unto death (Matt. 20:20ff.).

Concerning John, Eusebius, an early church historian during the Domitian persecution, wrote: *"the apostle and evangelist was banished to Patmos, and when succeeded by Nerva (A.D. 96), he returned to Ephesus to live out his life."*[29] John testifies that he wrote the Book of Revelation from the isle of Patmos.[30] While there is much legend handed down from the early centuries about John, there is no good reason to refute the tradition of the early church fathers as given by Irenaeus and Clement of Alexandria via Eusebius, that John lived out his life in Asia governing the churches as late as the reign of Trajan (A.D. 98).

4. Thomas, who demanded more evidence.

It is interesting that Thomas was also called Didymus, meaning "twin." Not a word in the Scriptures is said about any twin relative, so we are left to wonder about this additional name.

This man had been called the doubting disciple on the basis of the record in Jno. 14:5 and 29:25. One may question this as a true description of the whole man. When Jesus desired to go to Jerusalem against the objections of the disciples, it was Thomas alone who spoke up bravely, saying, *"Let us also go, that we may die with him."*[31] Also, at the close of the earthly ministry of Jesus it was Thomas who demanded proof of the resurrected Lord and upon seeing the glorified Saviour made one of the most forthright and dedicated confessions of anyone recorded in the Scriptures saying: *"My Lord and my God."*[32] Whatever his doubts may have been, he broke through to God into the clear sunlight of a new day.

Some of the Gnostics attached Thomas' name to an apocryphal gospel of which portions still remain in the languages of Greek, Latin, and Syriac. This spurious gospel purports to give an account of Jesus' childhood. Its main theme is to show that Jesus had miraculous power before his baptism. The present form of the gospel dates back no further than the 6th century. It was rejected as heretical and placed among many other spurious writings by both Origen and Eusebius.

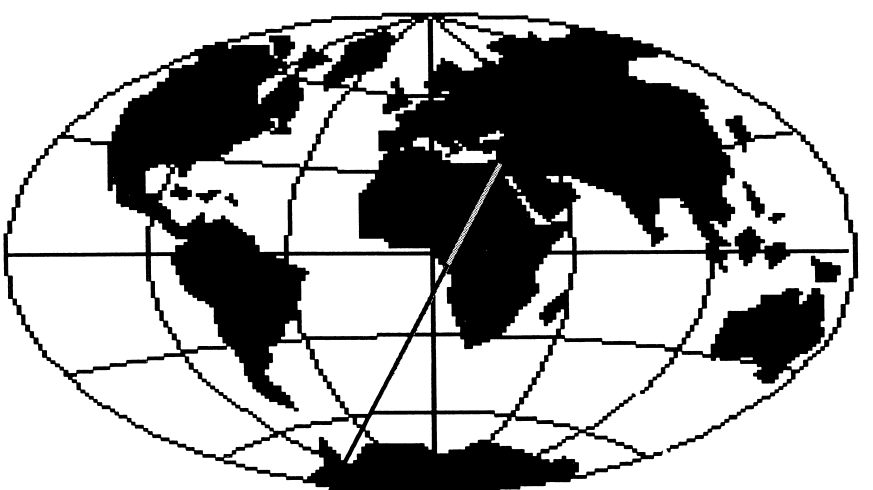
Could I with ink the ocean fill —
Were the earth of parchment made,
And every blade of grass a quill
And every man a scribe by trade,
To write the love of God above
Would drain the ocean dry,
And the scroll would not contain the whole,
Though it stretch from sky to sky. —Anonymous

5. Matthew, the converted tax collector.

Was Matthew related to James the son of Alphaeus? Not very likely even though their fathers had the same name.[33] Alphaeus was a very common name in their day. This disciple was one of the proverbial "outcasts" of the Jewish society. To be a publican (tax collector) was to be both stigmatized and ostracized by the people. Usually the job was lucrative at the expense of honesty.[34] Jesus called no idle men. Christianity is a labor of love. There is an old adage: "If you need someone to get something done, ask a busy man." Matthew was busy at his job when Jesus called him. He simply arose and walked away with the Lord[35]. Perhaps he had already heard the Master preach and had been deeply stirred by the power of his message and the signs that confirmed them.

In deep appreciation and gratitude, Matthew followed up his call to discipleship by giving a sizeable party in honor of Jesus. This caused murmuring among the scribes and the Pharisees. Much can be said about Matthew's faith, evangelistic zeal, and courage. He showed no concern for any priestly opposition for his assembling a party of tax collectors with Jesus as his guest of honor. Perhaps he desired to publicly announce his resignation to follow him.

Matthew must have had a fair degree of education. He had to have some accounting skills to undertake the responsibility of tax collecting. He also wrote the magnificent Gospel that bears his name. Matthew cared no more for what the crowd might say about his abrupt departure to follow Jesus than Jesus cared for what they might think about his calling a sinner to follow him. The evening party must have been shocking to the Jewish elite as they thought such sinful people as tax collectors must be avoided at any cost. Such socializing as this earned Jesus the stigma of being called a "friend of publicans and sinners." While they meant it as a shameful rebuke, it is through this type of contact that our Lord mined the precious stones for the New Jerusalem. Along with Matthew, all Christians rejoice in their calling and should be equally unconcerned about what the self-righteous say.



The center of the globe where salvation dawned

6. Philip, the inquirer.

Not much is known about the other disciples of Jesus. There is Philip who is called by some "the earnest inquirer" on the basis of what is recorded in John 1:43ff. and 14:8-9. He was won to Jesus at Bethany beyond Jordan in the earliest phase of Jesus' ministry.[36] He dwelt in the same town with Andrew and Peter (1:44) and seems to be closely associated with the two. He does not seem as aggressive as Andrew and John in his approach to Jesus, but more timidly waited for Jesus to come to him.

Such seeming timidity has given rise to some suggesting that he was the disciple that first wanted to "go and bury his Father" although there is no factual evidence of this. It has been suggested that he was a little slower to grasp some of Jesus' spiritual instruction (Jno. 14:8-9). Nevertheless, he ranks out front with Andrew in his missionary zeal being the second one to bring his friend Nathaniel to Jesus. Tradition says Philip preached the Gospel in Asia Minor and was buried in the city of Hierapolis.

7. Simon, the Zealot.

There is Simon the Zealot who longed in his earlier years to overthrow the government (if we can reliably interpret this from his name). According to Edersheim, it is likely that he had been a member of the Galilean Zealot party. Josephus identifies those who were eager to cast off the Roman yoke as "Zealots for the Law."[37]

8. The remaining apostles.

And there was Bartholomew, who was probably also Nathaniel,[38] and Lebbaeus Thaddaeus,[39] known also as Judas, (not to be confused with Judas Iscariot),[40] as well as James, the son of Alphaeus, of whom we know nothing.

Finally, there was Judas Iscariot who betrayed Jesus for thirty pieces of silver with a deceitful kiss. Had he remained loyal, this man could have gone down in history with equal honor to the other disciples. Jesus did not err in calling him to the apostleship. The offer of grace was open to Judas all the way to the final supper in the upper room (John 13) where it is said that "Satan entered" into him. Judas freely chose to betray the Master. Quite unlike Peter who was reclaimed from his terrible deed by rededicating his allegiance and love, Judas retreated into the oppressiveness of guilt. Trying to bear his burden alone, he found it unbearable and sought escape in suicide.[41]

(a) *These "Men of Clay" offer great hope for all men.* These were the men Jesus gathered about himself to instruct them more perfectly in the kingdom of heaven and to leave in their hands, as guided by the Holy Spirit, the responsibility of establishing the church. These men were, like each of us, men of clay whom Jesus molded into vessels for use in the Kingdom. Would the clay vessels prove to stand the scorching test of being purified by fire? Would the finished vessel be one of service and beauty for the Master's house? Or, would it crack under the fiery molding process? *It was a*

And the vessel that he made of clay was marred in the hand of the potter: so he made it again another vessel, as seemed good to the potter to make it (JER 18:4).

lofty adventure in faith. Jesus prayed for their salvation and was successful with all but one.[42] In spite of their common jealousies and striving against each other, these ordinary men could prove to be worthy vessels of honor. This should give great hope and comfort to all average people, for we can understand by this that one does not have to possess great ability or be of nobility to inherit eternal life. *Jesus widely uses the very ordinary person for service in the kingdom.* There will be some hurt, but one must allow himself to be totally pliable in his gentle molding hands.

Just as the parables of the net cast into the sea that gathered fish of all kinds, and the mustard seed which grew into a great tree to give lodgement to the birds of the air, so Jesus called those of varied background into his discipleship. He tells us this will ever be the nature of the Kingdom: "*And I, when I am lifted up from the earth, will draw all men to myself.*"[43] Many sermons have been preached and written about the diverse character of the first disciples as *Disciples of Clay,* by the late Peter Marshall. This small band of Christian workers consisting of diverse personalities is a cameo of the church's membership throughout the ages. People of all backgrounds come together in a common salvation to enjoy the blessings in Christ. "Whosoever will" may come from the four corners of the earth and sit down with Abraham and Isaac in the Kingdom of God regardless of his past or race, if only he will believe and submit his will to the Master. How important it is to be patient with others in the work of the Lord as well as with ourselves. These early apostles were ambitious men with fiery temperaments standing their ground in heated debate. Even though they were men of passion and highly competitive spirits, yet they were successful because they desired foremost "*The sincere milk of the word that they might grow thereby.*"[44] And grow they did in love and patience and lowliness.

IV. HOW JESUS SELECTED THE APOSTLES

Jesus chose these men after having given the most solemn thoughts on the matter. The selection of these men followed a lonely night of prayer in a mountain, apart from the distractions of the world.[45] Of all the disciples he called, he selected twelve for special service.

These men were known as:

1. ***Disciples,*** in that they were learners in the school of Jesus.

2. ***Friends,*** because he selected them to be with him.[46]

3. ***Apostles,*** because he sent them out to preach.

A. They needed Jesus and Jesus needed them

They needed Jesus, but it is plain that the "manly" part of Jesus also needed them. These, he sent out to preach the wonderful tidings concerning the kingdom of heaven which the world is reaping the benefits of today. If someone is inclined to think how ugly the world is today, just think of how benighted the world would have been throughout the centuries had it not been for Israel and the Old Testament law; and for the Church and the New Testament. Thank God for those men who gave us the leavening influence of truth through the sacrifice of their lives.

Henceforth I call you not servants; for the servant knoweth not what his lord doeth: but I have called you friends (Jno. 15:15).

References

1. James S. Stewart, *Op. cit.*, p. 55 - 56 (Previous page 27)
2. I Corinthians 15:6
3. Compare John 1:42, Luke 5:10-11, and Mark 3:13-16
4. James S. Stewart, *Op. cit.*, p. 59 (Previous page 27)
5. Clovis Chappell in a sermon on Andrew entitled "The Art of Playing Second Fiddle"
6. John 1:47; 6:8-9; 12:20-22
7. Consult a good Bible Dictionary on this topic
8. Matthew 16:18-19
9. John 1:42
10. Peter 5:1
11. Luke 22:62
12. Acts 2:38
13. Matthew 16:28ff
14. Acts 3-5
15. John 6:67-68
16. John 21:13
17. Matthew 16:18; cp. 26:69
18. John 21:17
19. Matthew 20:20
20. Mark 3:17
21. Luke 17:21; 19:10; II Pet. 3:9ff
22. Romans 8:23
23. Matthew 17
24. Acts 12:2
25. Mark 5:37; Matthew 17; 26:37
26. Mark 1:29; 13:2
27. Luke 9:49
28. John 9:36
29. Eusebius Ecclesiastical History, Book III, 18, 20
30. Revelation 1:4-9
31. John 11:16
32. John 20:28
33. Mark 2:14; cp. 3:18
34. Luke 3:13
35. Matthew 9:9
36. John 1:28-51;
37. Josephus, Jewish Wars IV:3, 9
38. John 1:44ff
39. Matthew 18:3
40. John 14:22
41. Matthew 26:14
42. John 17:9
43. John 12:32

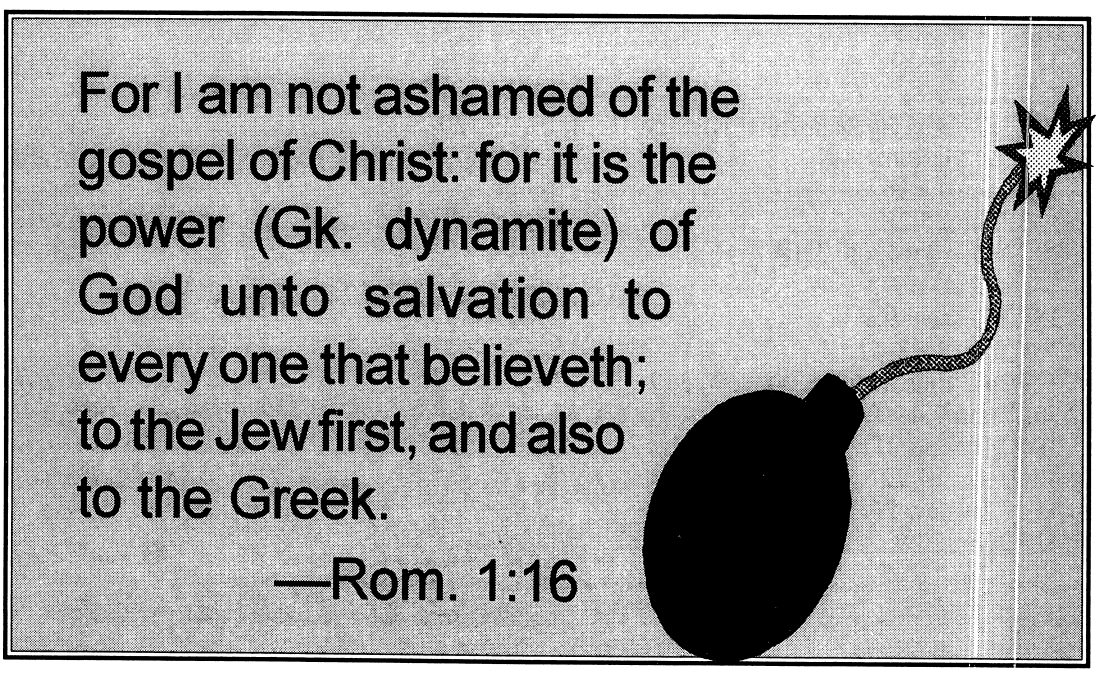
44. I Peter 2:2
45. Luke 6:12
46. Mark 3:14

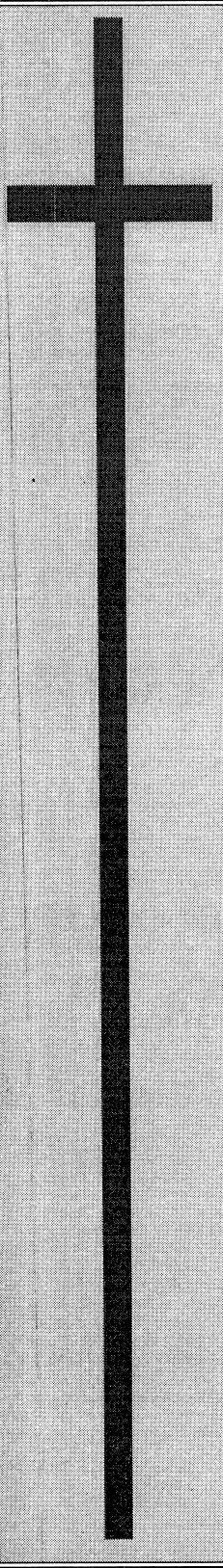
Supplementary Readings

Charles R. Brown, *These 12: A Study in Temperament.* New York, Cornwall Press, 1926 (Red Label Reprint)
F. F. Bruce, *New Testament History.* New York: Doubleday, 1969.
Floyd V. Filson, *Opening the New Testament.* Philadelphia, The Westminster Press, 1927
L. Thomas Holdcroft, *The Four Gospels,* Clayburn, B.C., CeePiCC, 1988
Herbert Lockyer, *All the Apostles of the Bible,* Grand Rapids, NY. Zondervan Publishing House

Questions for Chapter Eight

1. Relate testimony regarding the youthful ministry of Jesus.
2. Give evidence the youthful movement was not composed of social misfits and rebels of the day.
3. Give some reasons for calling the disciples.
4. Discuss the individual characteristics of each of the disciples mentioned in this chapter.





Outline for Chapter Nine

The Sermon on the Mount

I. One Sermon, Or A Composite?
   A. The central theme of the sermon
   B. A key verse
   C. Those eligible for God's blessings
      1. Blessed are the poor in spirit
      2. Blessed are they that mourn
      3. Blessed are the meek
      4. Blessed are they that hunger and thirst after righteousness
      5. Blessed are the merciful
      6. Blessed are the pure in heart
      7. Blessed are the peacemakers
   D. A demonstration of Jesus' superior word

"You have heard
it said . . . ,
but I say unto you . . "

(Jesus, Sermon on the Mount)

"This is my beloved Son, in
whom I am well pleased;
hear ye him."

(God, Mount of Transfiguration)

IGHTEOUSNESS IN THE KINGDOM

Chapter Nine

The Sermon on the Mount

Matthew 5-7; Luke 6:17-49

Purer in heart O God, help me to be;
That I thy holy Face, one day may see.
Keep me from secret sin, reign Thou my soul within;
Purer in heart, help me to be.
—Mrs. A.L. Davidson

1. ONE SERMON, OR A COMPOSITE?

There is some discussion among scholars as to whether the Sermon on the Mount was a single message delivered at one place or a collection of sermon notes from many sermons delivered by Jesus on various occasions and edited by Matthew for the best presentation to his Jewish audience. William Barclay calls it "a kind of epitome of all the sermons that Jesus ever preached."[1] Arthur W. Pink disagrees, believing it to be a single discourse. He refers to it as, "the longest discourse of our Lord recorded in the Scriptures."[2] Although Luke presents much of the same material as Matthew, he does omit some points in the main context but records them elsewhere in his Gospel. What he does record is written somewhat differently from Matthew. There is material in Luke that is not found in Matthew. A glance at a Book with the Gospels in parallel as that by A. T. Robertson is very enlightening.[3] It is not the purpose of this work to pursue critical matter, but to follow the sermon's theme. Matthew's account is better for this purpose as it has a discernible organization. This is observed by a study of his material which will prove to be both enlightening and stimulating.

A. The Central Theme of the Sermon on the Mount

The central theme in the Sermon on the Mount is to present: 1) the superior authority of Jesus' teaching to that of the scribes and Pharisees, 2) the character and happiness of those who would enter the kingdom of heaven and, 3) to inform all that it takes a superior righteousness to that of the Jewish traditionalists in order to enter the kingdom of heaven. In the previous chapters to this great sermon, Matthew quotes extensively from Old Testament prophecies proving Jesus to be the expected Messiah. He also records John the Baptist's endorsement of Jesus as the son of God, Jesus' superior baptism to John's, his victory over the devil in the wilderness temptation, and Jesus' initial call to some of his

disciples. Following all this is this unprecedented literary masterpiece. Matthew illustrates in this presentation that Jesus' teaching was incomparable with anything they had ever heard in synagogue. Matthew's Jewish readers are invited to choose between the old wine (traditional legalistic teaching they had heard all their lives) and the new wine of Jesus' doctrine. This was a gigantic undertaking for Matthew in the wake of centuries of Jewish indoctrination in the old legal traditions. This can be observed in a broad overview of Matthew's material in the Sermon on the Mount. (See Matt. 9:17-17)

B. A key verse

Matt. 5:20 is a key verse that announces Matthew's "superiority" theme. It trumpets the essentiality of a superior righteousness for seekers of the new kingdom of heaven. The Jewish hierarchy is not the role model of acceptable righteousness. Here Jesus states frankly: "*For I say unto you, that except your righteousness exceed that of the scribes and Pharisees, ye shall in no wise enter into the kingdom of heaven.*" This follows the beatitudes in which has been laid down the "basic premise" for entry into the new order. Those of Jesus' day were accustomed to viewing daily the outward pomp of the Pharisees' self righteousness. They frequently paused on the street corners, Jesus said, where they worded long prayers "*to be seen of men*" They made a great public display when giving alms to the poor. They attached large phylacteries (pockets of scripture) to their sleeves and foreheads. These were the depositories about which Jesus said: "*They make broad their phylacteries.*" They did this to appear deeply religious and flaunt their knowledge of the law.

If a graduate continued to wear his robe in the market places today after the graduation ceremonies were over, it would be a similar practice. It would also be like trying to impress others of one's holiness by the size of the Bible carried under the arm and also loving to be addressed by a religious title. Matthew's beatitudes contain a kind

Blessed are the poor in spirit
. . . they that mourn;
. . . the meek;
. . . they which do hunger
and thirst after righteousness;
. . . the merciful;
. . . the pure in heart;
. . . the peacemakers;
. . . they which are persecuted
for righteousness'sake . . .
(Matt. 5:1-12)

but frank rebuke against such gaudy professional "religiousness." The beatitudes serve notice that internalizing God's righteousness must occur. Beatitudes are scattered throughout the Old and New Testament. One of the most famous in the Old Testament is found in the first Psalm which begins: "*Blessed is the man that walketh not in the counsel of the ungodly.*" And then there is that famous beatitude near the close of the New Testament in Revelation 14:13: "*Blessed are the dead which die in the Lord.*" These are pronouncements of happiness upon a person who meet certain spiritual qualifications.

C. Those eligible for God's blessings

But here in Matthew 5 the subject is entrance into the kingdom of heaven and what that experience will be like. So Matthew begins the Sermon on the Mount with a cluster of eight beatitudes announcing the happiness and joy which will follow in a person's life if these behavior patterns become a way of life. Jesus is telling us that each individual must play a great part in bringing happiness to himself. A proud life that ignores these rules, despises his neighbor and acts independently of God, cannot find happiness in the long run. The following chart is given so a comprehensive study may be made of these behavior principles which usher in spiritual happiness. A discussion of these principles follows the chart.

Those Who Will Be Blessed (Become Happy)
Matthew 5:1-12

Poor in spirit (teachable)	Not the proud and unteachable
The mournful (over sin)	Not the impenitent
The meek (submissive to God)	Not the rebellious
Those hungering for divine approval	Not the self righteous
The merciful	Not the unforgiving
The pure in heart	Not the insincere & hypocritical
The peace makers	Not disturbers of the peace
Those who suffer for right	Not compromiser of truth
Those slandered for the truth	Not those who reproached truth

By referring to the above chart on the beatitudes and considering their meanings in the ensuing discussion, a better understanding can be reached as to why Matthew gave them "top billing" in his exemplary sermon by Jesus. These are rudimentary qualities that must come first in life before any lasting happiness can be reaped. They demonstrate that at the very beginning of discipleship these critical character traits must be present before one can enter into the happy state of the kingdom of heaven. In these beatitudes Matthew lays down the essential quality of character which is the bedrock of the kingdom; to possess this type of character consequently ushers in God's blessings.

1. Blessed are the poor in spirit.

Certainly a prerequisite for receiving the kingdom's blessings would be the openness of one's heart and a complete readiness to learn about the Messiahship of Jesus. The serious hindrance preventing the Jews from receiving the spiritual kingdom was a haughtiness of heart that blinded them to anything that threatened their traditions. Yet, as prophesied in the Old Testament by both Isaiah and Jeremiah, reception to divine instruction is a prerequisite to having part in the new order.[4]

John put it this way in his gospel: "*No man can come to me, except the Father which hath sent me draw him: and I will raise him up in the last day. It is written in the prophets, And they shall all be taught of God. Every man therefore that hath heard, and hath learned of the Father, cometh unto me.*"[5] Yet, they refused to hear and come. Even under the most convincing testimony they would not come. John demonstrates this in his narrative concerning the conversion of the blind man (9:1ff). So a prerequisite to that blessed (happy) state is to possess an essential poverty of spirit which makes it possible for one *to listen and be taught the truth.* As Barclay points out: "*Poor in spirit does not mean poor spirited.*" Such a person is not apt to possess the kind of zeal and radiant personality that would attract others to whatever he espoused. But the proud spirited cannot be taught, they are of the nature of those mentioned by Stephen in Acts 7: "*Ye stiffnecked and uncircumcised in heart and ears, ye do always resist the Holy*

Ghost: as your Father did, so do ye. Which of the prophets have not your fathers persecuted? And they have slain them which shewed before of the coming of the Just one; of whom ye have been now the betrayers and murders: Who have received the law by the disposition of angels, and have not kept it." (On this consult Barclay's commentary on The Gospel of Matthew.)

Note how much the verses mentioned in Acts 7 correlate with the first beatitude as well as that in Matthew 5:11-12: "*Blessed are ye, when men shall revile you, and persecute you, and shall say all manner of evil against you falsely, for my sake. Rejoice and be exceeding glad: for great is your reward in heaven: for so persecuted they the prophets which were before you.*" Therefore, the person who is humble enough to be taught and internalize the good news of the kingdom will enjoy a mental state of spiritual happiness.

2. Blessed are they that mourn.

This beatitude does not mean one who is always depressed about life. If this were true, it would contradict the first beatitude which assures an inflow of spiritual happiness at the initial conception of truth. This beatitude has a logical place in its second position and is placed there purposefully. Those who have first meekly received the message of God's love for the world, and discover in this that Jesus died to save them personally, are so affected by their new faith that they begin to mourn over their own sins as well as sin in general, both which have brought so much suffering to the incarnate God.

The person who can be truly comforted in this life is the individual who has been drawn to God through instruction in his word.[6] Each believer learns that his personal sins created the need for God's grace to be brought into the world. As a result his personal need for salvation has been met in Jesus, a great personal Saviour who has provided the perfect sacrifice and atonement for his sins. One mourns the awesomeness of universal sin and the destructive nature it has upon the world. Still he is comforted because he knows he has been delivered from the peril of the second death which will be eternal separation from all good.

3. Blessed are the meek.

This third beatitude also occupies its proper place because Matthew continues to progressively reveal the essentials for the happy mind of the converted soul in the kingdom.

"Meek" is a very interesting word. To some it conveys a thought of weakness but in the Bible it does not mean this at all. Those called meek in the scriptures, as Moses, are found among the world's strongest and most courageous personalities. Think of Moses standing before Pharaoh, the strongest potentate in all the world, demanding him to free the Israelites by the authority of Jehovah—a God Pharaoh knew nothing about. What tremendous courage and strength this took. Yet the Bible speaks of Moses as the meekest man on earth.[7]

The Greek word for meek *(praus)* does not mean weak in strength, *but a commitment of one's strength.*[8] Man has appreciated the strength of varied wild beasts and many centuries ago set himself to conquer their spirits to harness their energy. After an intense struggle against the untamed beasts, man was successful. The camel, the ox, the horse, and the elephant have submitted their will to man as their master. But they did not lose any of their strength in their domestication; it was improved and harnessed for good by submitting to a superior intelligence.

". . . all our righteousnesses are as filthy rags . . ." —Isaiah 64:6

The same thing happens at man's conversion. He submits his rebellious spirit to Jesus as his Lord and places himself under his control for improvement and service in good. He is as strong as ever, even stronger in the service of the Master. This is the meaning of spiritual meekness. A meek person has been made serviceable by his submission to Christ.

An excellent example is Saul of Tarsus who became meek in his submission to Christ.[9] Before his conversion he was breathing out threatenings and slaughters against Christians, even jailing them in distant cities. After his encounter with Christ on the Damascus road, he gave his life without reservation to his Lord. After this, he said he was able to do all things through Jesus (Phil. 4:13).

By now it should be clear that Matthew is progressively revealing in the beatitudes a definite process by which one enters the kingdom.[10] Beatitude 1: *One must be open to Jesus' instruction in order to enter the kingdom.* Beatitude 2: *One must be made conscience of sin, against God as well as himself, in order to enter the kingdom.* Beatitude 3: *A person must surrender his strength to his new Master both in spirit and body and serve him in righteousness.*

Having reached the point of conversion, the remainder of the beatitudes deal with the new spiritual nature received upon becoming a citizen of the kingdom. Paul refers to conversion as being "translated" from the kingdom of darkness into the kingdom of God's dear Son.[11]

4. Blessed are they that hunger and thirst after righteousness: for they shall be filled.

One who has surrendered to Jesus and has "tasted the powers of the world to come," is like a healthy new baby who comes into the world demanding to be fed (1 Pet. 2:2). There were many current philosophies that offered solutions to the problems of life and pointed in various directions for life's fulfillment. These were called "philosophies and vain deceit"(Col. 2:8-10). Paul comments further about these to Timothy saying that there were some people ever learning and never able to come to the knowledge of the truth. This sounds utterly modern when we think of all those under the spell and vanity of metaphysics. Jesus is clearly stating in these beatitudes that they who come to him would share a similar feeling with David who wrote in the twenty-third Psalm, "*The Lord is my Shepherd, I shall not want,*" and "*Thou preparest a table for me in the presence of mine enemies: thou annointest my head with oil; my cup runneth over.*"

Barclay makes a most interesting point concerning this beatitude. He points out that the Greek word from which this hunger is taken indicates that this person possesses a hunger that far surpasses the desire for a mid-morning snack or for only a piece of bread. This person, he says, *hungers for the whole loaf.* A characteristic of the newly born Christian is an avid desire for the whole of God's Word. One may recall the old hair cream commercial that said, "a little dab will do you." This modern proverb seems appropriate for those who claim faith but are inactive in Christian service. According to this beatitude, only those will be filled who are avid for righteousness.

Picture the craving desire of a lost desert traveler whose last drop of water has been gone for two scorching days. His mouth is parched and his tongue and lips swollen. Suddenly a flowing stream appears before him clear as crystal.

In a mad dash to quench his thirst, he rushes madly forward casting himself headlong into the pool. However, it proves to be only a mirage leaving him without hope in the wastes of burning sand. Jesus promises that the water of life flowing from him will not be a fleeting mirage. His word is certain, filling every hungry soul.

Sadly, some would poison the water of life. After drinking from such a life-giving fountain, what person would then fill it with poison? One would think that he must hate all those who came to this place after him. Yet, there are those who corrupt the word of God with their creeds (2 Cor. 2:17). These preach their own doctrines and corrupt the

Gospel of Jesus (Matt. 15:8-9; Col. 2:17) who said in John 7:37-38: "*If any man thirst, let him come unto me, and drink. He that believeth in me, as the scripture hath said, out of his belly shall flow rivers of living water.*"

Concerning those who would pervert the gospel, Peter warns: "*They are wells without water.*" Those hungering and thirsting after the true water of life will not only have their souls filled here, but in heaven have the "*pure river of water of life, clear as crystal, proceeding out of the throne of God and of the Lamb.*"[12] There are some who view one's spiritual appetite as an opportunity for gain. There are those who claim they have freely partaken of the water of life, then only to set up shop, selling miracles to sincere fellow travelers for lucrative gain which they call "love offerings." As the merchandising priests of Jesus' day, these again make the Father's free gift of grace a means of merchandise.

5. Blessed are the merciful: for they shall obtain mercy.

There is no greater blessing needed by man than God's mercy and grace as well as forgiveness from his fellow man. Against these we all have sinned grievously. As Lot lingered while angels warned him to flee for his life, we too, in spite of the Gospel's pleading, linger in sin. No sins are condemned more often and severely than those by self-righteous souls in the New Testament who felt no need of personal forgiveness or mercy from God. Neither did they show mercy to those whom they felt had wronged them.

Again and again in example, model prayers, parables and personal instruction, Jesus proclaimed the need for all to show mercy to the sinner. "*But go ye,*" Jesus said in Matthew 9:13, "*and learn what this meaneth, I will have mercy and not sacrifice.*" Again, three chapters later, he proclaimed, "*But if ye had known what this meaneth, I will have mercy and not sacrifice, ye would have not condemned the guiltless.*" To the pitiful lepers, and to the blind who cried out for mercy Jesus blessed with health. He then forgave them of their sins, the greatest mercy needed by all.

He gave the parable of the Pharisee and the publican to demonstrate a person who stood before God proclaiming his own righteousness. In this parable the Pharisee was totally unconscious of his sins as opposed to the publican who was burdened with his need for pardon (Lu. 18:9-14). Also, a powerful lesson on the need to forgive others in order to receive mercy from God is that of the unmerciful servant in Matthew 18:23-35.

6. Blessed are the pure in heart: for they shall see God.

To "see" God or "see" the kingdom of heaven takes special spiritual eyes. Jesus in Matthew 13:13-16 spoke these words: "*Therefore I speak to them in parables: because they seeing see not; and hearing they hear not, neither do they understand. And in them is fulfilled the prophecy of Esaias, which saith, By hearing ye shall hear, and shall not understand: and seeing ye shall see, and not perceive: For this people's heart is waxed gross, and their ears are dull of hearing, and their eyes they have closed; lest at any time they should see with their eyes, and hear with their ears, and should understand with their heart, and should be converted, and I should heal them. But blessed are your eyes, for they see: and your ears, for they hear.*"

To Nicodemus, Jesus said, "*Except a man be born again, he cannot **SEE** the kingdom of God.*"[13] It is apparent from these passages, and the beatitude at which we are looking, that a prerequisite for dwelling with God is having the desire to do so. God has always wanted to dwell with his people; but they have not wanted to dwell with him (Ex. 29:45-46). Paul said of many, "*Because that, when they knew God, they glorified him not as God. And even as they did not like to retain*

God in their knowledge, God gave them over to a reprobate mind, to do those things which are not convenient" (Rom. 1:21ff.). It should have been obvious from all the prophecies concerning the New Kingdom and rule of God to come that it would not be realized by the carnal sword, but by the Spirit.[14] Only those will dwell with God who desire more than anything else His Holy presence. But his presence is possible only if one is willing to be pure in heart, for God's absolute purity and holiness cannot compromise with one whit of impurity. Paul wrote concerning this in 2 Corinthians 6:14-18: "*Be ye not unequally yoked together with unbelievers: for what fellowship hath righteousness with unrighteousness? and what communion hath light with darkness? And what concord hath Christ with Belial? or what part hath he that believeth with an infidel?*"

Since the pure in heart are the only ones who can ever hope to see (dwell with) God, purification of the heart is of critical importance. Luke says that this process takes place through faith.[15] Paul adds that faith comes by hearing the word of God (Rom. 10:17). By viewing both these texts, we have the plan of coming to dwell with God revealed as follows: 1) One must study the word of God to create faith in the heart (II Timothy 2:15), 2) When one believes the word concerning the good and righteous God, a burning desire to dwell in his holiness forever must follow, 3) dwelling with God demands a cleansing from *all* the impurities in one's heart.

When one believes the Gospel message concerning the atoning blood of Jesus and its cleansing effects upon one's soul, he seeks first at all cost this divine cleansing. This demands his soul being washed in the blood of Jesus (Rev. 1:5). When one's faith has increased enough to demand this cleansing for himself he is commanded to "*be baptized for the remission of his sins*" (Mark 16:15-16). The sinner in this act of obedience contacts the cleansing effects of Jesus' blood through faith which leads him to be baptized into Christ (Gal. 3:27). It is no wonder that Jesus said in the Great Commission: "*Go ye therefore, and teach all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost . . .*" and "*Go ye into all the world and preach the gospel to every creature. He that believeth and is baptized shall be saved; but he that believeth not shall be damned*" (Matt. 28:18-20; Mark 16:15-16). In speaking on this very issue Peter, many years later said, "*Seeing ye have purified your souls in obeying the truth through the Spirit unto unfeigned love of the brethren, see that ye love one another with a pure heart fervently: being born again, not of corruptible seed, but of incorruptible, by the word of God, which liveth and abideth forever*" (I Pet. 1:22-23). Because of their guileless soul, truly the pure in heart are enabled to "see God" much like Nathaniel.

7. Blessed are the peacemakers: for they shall be called the children of God.

God is a God of peace (II Cor. 3:11). Those who are his children are partakers of his divine nature (II Cor. 3:11). Consequently, godly children are peacemakers. The Psalmist said, "*Behold how good and how pleasant it is for brethren to dwell together in unity*" (Psa. 133:1).

It would be a terrible contradiction for one who is longing to dwell with God be at the same time a fermenter of strife and division. There is nothing more beautiful than a congregation of God's people at peace with God and each other, busy in the work of the Lord.

And there is nothing more frightfully blasphemous and ugly than one who is contentious, warring and divisive. Paul admonishes the Romans to "*mark those who cause divisions and offenses, contrary to the doctrine . . . and avoid them.*" Adding to this he says, "*. . . the God of peace be with you always*" (Rom. 16:17ff.)

"Peacemakers" is a word of action. Some may have the idea that to withdraw from the world, dwell behind closed doors and to mind one's own business, is to be an accomplished peacemaker.

It is not the role of the child of God to always play it safe in difficult situations. The Christian is one who actively seeks peace

among his associates.

He dares to tackle problems that cause division. He frankly points out the errors and speaks privately with those contributing to disturbances. He makes every attempt to calm explosive situations knowing at the same time those with ugly dispositions will seek to discredit him. Still he presses on for the glory of the peaceful abiding congregation of the church of Christ. This is wonderfully true: "*Blessed are the peacemakers: for they shall be called the children of God.*

Blessed are they which are persecuted for righteousness' sake: for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. Blessed are ye when men shall revile you, and persecute you, and shall say all manner of evil against you falsely, for my sake, rejoice and be exceedingly glad: for great is your reward in heaven: for so persecuted they the prophets before you.

Jesus is forewarning all who seek entry into the new kingdom to be prepared to suffer. Truth and righteousness have always been offensive to those who seek their own selfish ambitions by any means. This can be noted immediately outside Eden with the two brothers Cain and Abel. Cain slew his brother because Abel's deeds were righteous and his own heart evil. This is the constant war of wickedness. Jesus considers us either on one side or the other. "*No man can serve two masters,*" he said (Matt. 6:24). This being true, Jesus is saying to all that if one is suffering for righteousness, this is his badge of citizenship in the kingdom. One who does so is doing no more than other righteous saints have done throughout the centuries.

Furthermore, Jesus Christ became our example in suffering for our salvation. Therefore all Christians should fortify themselves in spirit because of his death for us. Note that he says: "*for he that hath suffered in the flesh hath ceased from sin. . .*" Peter adds, "*if any man suffer as a Christian, let him not be ashamed; but let him glorify God on this behalf*" (I Pet. 4:1, 15-16). The teacher who would win souls by depicting Christianity as a bland experience which always brings pleasant and peaceful coexistence with his neighbors, is doing a disservice to his student. Thus the closing beatitudes are a call to suffer to maintain right relationship with God at all costs. John in Revelation 2:10 put it this way: "*Be thou faithful unto death, and I will give thee a crown of life.*" Those who want to share in the resurrection must be prepared to share also in Gethsemane.

I walked a mile with Pleasure,
and she chattered all the way,
But left me none the wiser,
for all she had to say,
I walked a mile with Sorrow,
and ne'er a word said she,
But, oh, the lessons I learned
from Sorrow,
When Sorrow walked with me!
—Anonymous.

It is quite true: "*Blessed are they who are persecuted for righteousness sake: for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.*"

D. A demonstration of Jesus' superior word.

After Jesus emphatically states that righteousness must exceed what had been practiced by the scribes and Pharisees, there follows a list of things which serve as specific examples as to what he meant. The thing that stands out in contrast is his repeated expression: "*You have heard that it was said . . . but I say to you.*"

In this there is a comparison made that shows the spiritual nature of the new order. The cure for the problem is a new spirit, a converted heart. Dealing only with law had failed to change the heart. The prophets had prophesied that the new covenant would be an age of the Spirit when the law would be written on the heart and not on tables of stone (Jer. 31:31). Jesus proclaims that sin takes place in the heart before it ever reaches action. Therefore to correct the heart removes the condemnation of the law.

Note that Jesus repeated five times the following statement in the sermon on the

mount: "*You have heard it said. . ., but I say unto you.*" The Sermon on the Mount is a barrage of spiritual doctrine launched against the inadequacies of rigid legalism on which the Pharisees had capitalized to demonstrate an outward piety.

Throughout the Sermon on the Mount Matthew hammers away at the burdensome yoke of the law by demonstrating again and again the superior power of Jesus' doctrine. This sermon, placed near the beginning of Matthew's Gospel, serves as a spiritual nucleus of the coming new kingdom of heaven. Anticipating that many would call him Lord, yet reject his word, Jesus said, "*Not every one that sayeth unto me Lord, Lord, shall enter the kingdom of heaven; but he that doeth the will of my Father which is in heaven*" (Matt. 7:21).

One should study closely the parable at the close of the Sermon on the Mount. The central theme is: *the wise man hears the word of Jesus and obeys it* (See also Heb. 5:9). The wise builder's house will stand every storm of life. On the other hand, the foolish builder who builds upon a sandy foundation (not hearing the word of God), will see his house destroyed by future judgment and he will be greatly shocked to see all his hopes collapse. Matthew shows Jesus serving notice that to build upon his word is to build upon the rock that will stand the test of time and judgment (Matt. 16:17-18).

The last two verses in Matthew 7 reveal that the Sermon on the Mount had a positive effect upon Jesus' audience: "*And it came to pass, when Jesus had finished these saying, the people were astonished at his doctrine: for he taught them as one having authority, and not as the scribes*" (Matt. 7:28-29). The goal reached in the sermon which Matthew desires for the reader to see and weigh in heart is: there is a great and obvious difference between the wisdom of Jesus and the instruction of the scribes. His unique teaching is reflected in the comments of those who heard him and said: "*No man ever taught like this man.*"

Law of Moses	Kingdom of Heaven
1. Thou shalt not commit murder. . .	.Do not hate in your heart
2. Thou shalt not commit adultery. . .	Do not lust in your heart
3. Moses permitted divorce. . .	.Must not divorce faithful spouse
4. Do not swear falsely	.No oaths, your word is sufficient
5. An eye for eye	.Return not evil for evil
6. Love neighbor.	.Love your enemies, do good to them

The chart on the previous page is not complete as Matthew lists many more comparisons between the law and the rule in the kingdom of heaven, but it sufficiently demonstrates the superiority of the spiritual rule on the kingdom of heaven over the legalism of the old law. One may profit by browsing through the Sermon on the Mount noting the number of times Jesus makes comparative differences between Judaism and the rule in the kingdom of heaven.

References

1. William Barclay, *The Daily Study Bible*, "Matthew, vol. 1" (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1956) p. 79
2. Arthur W. Pink, *An Exposition of the Sermon on the Mount* (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1970) p. 13
3. A. T. Robertson, *A Harmony of the Gospels* (New York: Harper & Row, 1950).
4. Isaiah 54:13; Jeremiah 31:34; John 6:44-45
5. John 6:44-45
6. *Ibid.*
7. Numbers 12:3
8. See *W. E. Vine's Dictionary of New Testament Words* (Westwood, N.J.: Fleming H. Revell Company, 1964)
9. Acts 9:22
10. John 3:3-5
11. Colossians 1:13-14
12. Revelation 22:1
13. John 3:3
14. Cf. Zechariah 4:6 and Joel 2:28
15. Acts 15:9

Supplementary Readings

Farrar, Frederic William, *The Life of Christ,* (Cleveland, The World Publishing Company) 1965

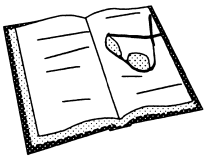
Jones,D. Martin Lloyd , *Studies In The Sermon On The Mount,* (Grand Rapids, Wm. B. Eerdman's Publishing Company) 1974

Morgan, G. Campbell, *The Gospel according to Matthew,* (New York, Fleming H. Revell Company) 1924

Questions for Chapter Nine

1. Discuss the likelihood of the Sermon on the Mount being a collection of Jesus' teachings.
2. What purpose do the beatitudes serve in Matthew's Gospel?
3. What do each of the beatitudes signify?
4. How does Matthew demonstrate the superiority of Jesus' word over the Law?

—Read This—



"For I am not ashamed of the gospel of Christ: for it is the power of God unto salvation to every one that believeth; to the Jew first, and also the Greek." —Rom. 1:16

"Moreover, brethren, I declare unto you the gospel which I preached unto you, which also ye have received, and whereby ye stand; by which also ye are saved, if ye keep in memory what I preached unto you, unless you have believed in vain. For I delivered unto you first of all that which I also received, how that Christ died for our sins according to the scriptures; and that he was buried, and that he rose again the third day according to the scriptures: and that he was seen of Cephas, then of the twelve: After that he was seen of above five hundred brethren at once . . . ." —I Cor. 15:1-4

"Therefore we are buried with him by baptism into death, that like as Christ was raised up from the dead by the glory of the Father, even so we also should walk in newness of life." —Rom. 6:4

"And to you who are troubled rest with us, when the Lord Jesus shall be revealed from heaven with his mighty angels, in flaming fire taking vengeance on them that know not God, and that obey not the Gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ." —II Thess. 1:7-8

Outline for Chapter Ten

Matthew 8: A Preview of the Coming Kingdom

I. The Order of Grace in the Coming Kingdom
   A. Matthew demonstrates the order grace will follow
      1. First, a Jewish leper is healed
      2. Second, a palsied Gentile is healed
   B. What constitutes "great faith"?
      1. Jesus compliments a Gentile's faith
      2. The centurion recognized Jesus' unique authority
      3. Go!—Come!—Do!
      4. Jesus commands the demons to "Go"
      5. Water has been God's dividing line in many tests of faith
      6. Peter's mother-in-law is healed
      7. Jesus commands the sinner to "Come"to him
      8. The servant is to "Do"the will of the master
   C. Summary
      1. Go
      2. Come
      3. Do

Matthew 8: A Preview of the Coming Kingdom

Our Father which art in heaven,
Hallowed be thy name,
Thy Kingdom come.
Thy will be done in earth,
As it is in heaven.
(Matt. 6:9-10)

Matthew 7:28-29, 8-12; Romans 1:16; Acts 1:8;

I. THE ORDER OF GRACE IN THE COMING KINGDOM

Following the presentation of evidence in the Sermon on the Mount concerning, (1) the superiority of Jesus' Word, (2) the basic qualifications for entering the kingdom, and, (3) the privileges and responsibilities of those entering the kingdom, Matthew, the converted publican, now gives us a preview in chapter 8 of the manner in which grace will be offered to all humanity. He begins by presenting a scene in Jesus' ministry where two *terminally ill patients* are healed. The order of healing is extremely important to observe. *The first to receive grace is a Jew, the second a Gentile.* This signals the universal scope and order that grace will flow in the coming kingdom.

Note that this is consistent with other inspired New Testament writers on the subject. Luke in Acts 1: 8 declares: "*But you shall receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you; and you shall be my witnesses in Jerusalem and in all Judea and Samaria and to the end of the earth*" (RSV).

In this passage the order is the same as observed in Jesus' ministry in Matthew 8, i.e. in Jerusalem, Judea (the Jews), Samaria, and finally unto the uttermost parts of the earth (the Gentiles). And as Paul also wrote: "*For I am not ashamed of the Gospel of Christ: for it is the power of God unto salvation to everyone that believeth; to the Jew first, and also to the Greek.*" [1]

The healing of both Jew and Gentile in Matthew 8 by Jesus signals the new universality of the kingdom of heaven. Matthew foreshadows the order universal grace would follow by illustrating Jesus extending mercy to a Jew first, then to a Gentile. One should remember that the prophets had predicted the inclusion of the Gentiles in the New Covenant for centuries. Much of Isaiah's work is dedicated to God's universal grace and his love for all mankind.[2] In full harmony with the prophets, the gospel writers make clear that "whosoever believeth" would be the deciding factor for citizenship in the new king-

dom—*not merely Jewish birth.*[3] Abraham's spiritual family was known, not by genealogy, but by faith; inheritance was not by human sperm, but by God's spiritual seed—*his word* (Lu. 8:11). Conception would take place by faith in any heart womb. On one of his visits to Jerusalem Paul may have heard of Jesus' geographical formula for expanding the Gospel from the other apostles, but he may have received it directly when he was called to be the apostle to the Gentiles (Ac. 22:21). Paul contended, that just as Abraham had received the blessing of God by faith and not by fleshly pedigree, the same was equally true for all his spiritual descendants. Abraham's faith was the essential factor that obtained the inheritance by grace in the first place. Therefore, the Gentiles must be included if they had Abrahamic faith. If they believed God's promise to resurrect Jesus, just as Abraham did Isaac, they could be counted among the righteous; for God was God of all, who justified everyone on the basis of faith in his word even beyond death.[4]

Therefore, Abraham was the father of all faithful people, whether Jew or Gentile. The blessing was promised to all nations. None could merit a *spiritual inheritance* by having a fleshly genealogy that reached back to Abraham.[5] Through faith, both Jew and Gentile had an equal right to justification.[6] Jesus even dared to point this out in his home synagogue. He said some Gentiles had demonstrated greater faith than the Jews.[7] Preaching a universal gospel that placed the uncircumcised Gentiles on an equal footing with the circumcised Jews caused him to be cast out of his home synagogue in Nazareth.[8]

A. Matthew demonstrates the order grace will follow

1. First, a Jewish leper is healed (Matt. 8:1ff.).

Leprosy was a dreadful and most hated disease which rotted away the flesh. No one understood its cause nor how to treat it. In so many ways its disastrous effects upon the body were much like the effects of sin upon the soul. Leprosy, extremely subtle at first, gradually worsened in state until the body became a loathsome mass of putrid sores. In advanced stages the skin would rot and fall away leaving the bones exposed. It had no known cure and eventually claimed the lives of all its victims. The first evidence of leprosy caused the most courageous to tremble.[9] This was the dreadful disease that had wasted the Jewish man that Jesus met coming down the mountain after delivering the sermon on the mount. Because of its awful effects upon the body, and emotions as well, leprosy is typical of the damning effects sin has upon the soul. Leprosy and sin are typical in at least the following four ways:

(a) *Both leprosy and sin were insidious in their onset.* Early detection was difficult because their early stages were very subtle. By their early unnoticed slow encroachment, one could have either affliction for awhile without being aware of the danger.

(b) *Both plagues were highly contagious and were looked upon as unclean and defiling.* Once detected, to prevent the spread of the disease, a leper was cast outside the camp. He was thereafter to cry, "Unclean, unclean" when he saw anyone approaching. Sin also renders one unclean. In some instances under the law, sinners were put to death to prevent its spread. Touching either a leper or a sinner defiled a person. This prevented attendance at worship until undergoing a period of cleansing.

(c) *Both sin and leprosy led through contemptible stages.* Each eventually culminated in either physical or spiritual death. Even the leper's family had nothing to do with him. Lepers were forced to live together in colonies of the damned until death finally came.

(d) *Except by the divine grace of God, neither leprosy nor sin had any cure.* These similarities have contributed to many sermons on sin and leprosy. Following Matthew's record of the Sermon on the Mount, he reveals Jesus' graceful healing power by picturing him restoring a pitiful

Jewish leper to health. Notice that *Jesus touched the man.* This attracted the attention of everyone. To touch a leper was suicidal! One would be thought insane, not just because it rendered him unclean according to Jewish law and prevented his worship at the Temple, it exposed him to certain death.

Here, the dreadful disease of AIDS comes to mind. Precautions are being taken to prevent this fatal disease from ravaging our present generation. Urgent research is being conducted to find an effective vaccine against the virus. Because sin is its primary cause, it could be quickly controlled by ceasing ugly habits (Rom. 1:26, 32). Because most fear exposure to this horrible, incurable disease, a terrible stigma is attached to it.

As an object lesson, Jesus deliberately touched the leprous Jew to demonstrate his fearless love for this diseased man and his power to heal the hopeless. Jesus was the hope of Israel. He had the divine power to heal her spiritual afflictions. Matthew presents this miracle to illustrate the authority of the Sermon on the Mount. Israel is seen as spiritually leprous and without hope, but in Jesus' word there is love and healing power for them just as effective as it was for the leper. Jesus' grace was welcomed by the leper, but it did not exempt him from keeping the law. After being healed, Jesus sent him to the priest to offer the gift Moses commanded for a testimony unto them. Matthew's evidence is that Jesus is from God and is the Messiah of Israel. All should come quickly to him for salvation. Jesus' fearlessness in touching the leper demonstrated God's great condescension to come to earth and offer sinful Israel his mercy. It demonstrated that God was offering salvation to the Jews from a death far worse than physical leprosy would bring, that of eternal separation from God

Jesus pointed out to the Pharisees that religion without compassion is only a vain formality, and no amount of sacrifice could avail them anything from God without a ready heart to forgive others.[10] Compassion and forgiveness were spiritual qualities greater than formal observance of the Sabbath day. Jesus shocked many by performing works of compassion on this day.[11]

So, Matthew illustrated the Sermon on the Mount by following it with an instance where Jesus immediately extended mercy to a Jewish leper. Paul agreed with Matthew's order of grace when he said: "*For I am not ashamed of the gospel of Christ: for it is the power of God unto salvation to everyone that believeth; to the Jew first, and also the Greek.*" [12]

2. Second, a palsied Gentile is healed.

After traveling to Capernaum, Matthew reveals that Jesus' second work of mercy is requested by a Roman centurion. He does not ask for himself, but that his servant might be healed of the dreaded disease of palsy. Palsy also was a horrifying illness. It was a disease that invaded the central nervous system leaving one paralyzed and, as in this instance, "grievously tormented" (in terrible pain). Just as Matthew used the instance of a dying leper to illustrate Israel's need of divine mercy, he follows it with an instance where *a Gentile is in need of healing.* He thus demonstrates the universal need of God's mercy. It reveals our Lord's willingness to save all, the Jews first, and also the Gentiles.

It is true that these examples were only physical healings, but Matthew wants the reader to see that this divine power *can also forgive sin.* So he now proceeds with further evidence to warrant Jesus' authority. Following in chapter 9, Matthew records the healing of a second palsied man, but here he goes a step further showing that Jesus also forgives the man's sins. Afterward, Jesus asks his critics this deeper question: "*Wherefore think ye evil in your hearts? For whether is easier, to say, Thy sins be forgiven thee; or to say, Arise, and walk? But that ye may know that the Son of man hath power on earth to forgive sins (then saith he to the sick of the palsy), Arise, take up thy bed, and go unto thine house.*" [13] The point is, all divine healing is from God. His divine power is not limited to physical healing. His omnipotent power can heal the souls of men who cry for mercy. Previously, in chapter 8, the reader is asked to consider

identity of Jesus. Is he God or man?

The miracle in chapter 9 asks the reader to be fair in this judgment: If Jesus is only a man, how can he heal such diseases that only God can cure? On the other hand, if Jesus is God, can he not also forgive sins? Also, because he heals both Jew and Gentile, is he not a God with mercy for everyone?

In Acts 10:34, Peter addressed Cornelius: "*Of a truth I perceive that God is no respecter of persons: **But in every nation** he that feareth him, and worketh righteousness, is accepted with him.*" In this manner Matthew depicts the divine order that mercy will follow in the new kingdom: "*to the Jew first, and also to the Greek.*"

By these multiracial healings, Matthew illustrates that all are terminally ill with sin. All need *the healing power of God's grace.* Jesus is willing to heal the world. He is the only answer for sin, the terminal illness of the universe. "*We all have sinned and come short of the glory of God*" (Rom. 3:23).

B. What constitutes "great faith" ?

Not only did Jesus heal a Gentile, he states clearly that this centurion had greater faith than any he had found in Israel. Evidence of this is seen in the conversation between Jesus and the Centurion (Matt. 8:8ff.). This Gentile recognized the omnipotent authority of the mere *spoken word of Jesus.* He did not consider Jesus' physical presence necessary to receive his mercy. When Jesus offered to travel to the centurion's house to heal his servant, he is shocked when the centurion replied: "*I am not worthy that thou shouldest come under my roof: but **speak the word only**, and my servant shall be healed.*" None of the disciples had given any indication that they believed Jesus could heal without being physically present as this centurion did. This caused Jesus to be amazed at the centurion's remark that he need not be present to cure the illness. Matthew's point is this: with the coming of the kingdom, Jesus would be *crucified—physically* removed from the earth, but his mercy would continue and his power would still be available by his Holy Spirit. Now, it can be understood why Jesus complemented this centurion so highly. He had expressed an insight far beyond any of the Jews. They were the elect people to be the light to the Gentiles of which this man represented. The centurion expressed the quality of faith all believers would need after Jesus' death and his physical absence. It would be a trust based upon faith and not his visual presence (II Cor 5:7).

Also, this Gentile demonstrated far greater humility than many of the Jews. He felt unworthy for Jesus to come to his home. But Jesus was unwelcome by the Jews. "*He came to his own, and his own received him not.*" This faith in the invisible presence of Jesus' power was even superior to some of the apostles at that time. Jesus said to Thomas: "*Because thou hast seen me, thou hast believed: **blessed are they that have not seen, and yet have believed***" (Jno. 20:29; See also II Cor. 5:7).

The centurion's humble confession: "*I am not worthy that thou shouldest come under my roof: but speak the word only, and my servant shall be healed,*" is reminiscent of the first beatitude: "*Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.*" This receptive attitude ushers in the initial blessing mentioned in the beatitudes. Such is very commendable coming from a man of authority who could speak this way to a subjugated Jew. Whether Jew or Gentile, such an humble person can receive the blessing of the kingdom of heaven. Jesus emphasized this when he said: "*Verily, I say unto you, That many shall come from the east and the west, and shall sit down with Abraham and Isaac, and Jacob, in the kingdom of heaven. But, the children of the kingdom shall be cast out into outer darkness: there shall be weeping and gnashing of teeth.*" By faith in his word, praise God, we Gentiles have been granted an inheritance in the kingdom. We see by the presentation of events in Matthew 8 that even though we do not have the physical presence of Jesus, we still have God's mercy available through the invisible Spirit and power of his word, if we will only humbly accept it.

1. Jesus compliments a Gentile's faith.

The centurion in Matthew 8 was a man of authority. Jesus was not given to flattery and paid few compliments. When he complemented someone, it was due to deep faith and trust in God. In what way was the faith of this Roman soldier found to be so praiseworthy by Jesus?

2. The centurion recognized Jesus' unique authority.

The great faith of the centurion in the omnipotent power of Jesus' word is obvious because he understood that *the physical presence of Jesus was wholly unnecessary for the blessing to occur.* This is in contrast to the faith of great disciples like Mary and Martha. Upon Jesus' late arrival at the death scene of their brother Lazarus in John 11, they exclaimed: "*If you had been here our brother would not have died.*" Jesus wanted them to have the greater faith of believing that his power was omnipresent and ever living. Great faith does not reckon that Jesus' physical presence is essential for his blessings, but it transcends death and believes in the resurrection. The time was soon coming when Jesus would not be physically present with the disciples. Then they would be totally reliant upon the Holy Spirit for guidance, healing and forgiveness. The centurion had a great faith indeed to recognize such omnipresent authority in Jesus this early in his ministry—*especially outside Israel.* No wonder Jesus marvelled at this Gentile's faith.

Furthermore, the centurion said to Jesus, "*I am a man under authority, having soldiers under me: and I say to this man, Go, and he goeth; and to another, Come, and he cometh and to my servant, Do this, and he doeth it.*" The statement is descriptive of Jesus' authority in the new kingdom and this is what Matthew wants his readers to see! Note the centurions words that designate authority:

3. Go! Come! Do!

As we shall presently see, the above commands mentioned by the centurion as expressions of authority, are the very commands Matthew records Jesus using when he called his disciples. As we shall presently see, these are commands that characterize his position as Lord in the new kingdom of God. They depict: (1) Jesus' superior power over Satan, (2) his invitation for citizenship in the kingdom, and (3) the responsibility that follows the blessing of spiritual healing. Following is an examination of each of these commands.

4. Jesus commands the demons to "Go" (Matt. 8:32).

Matthew wants the reader *to see the demonstration of the authority of Jesus' spoken word.* Jesus traveled to the land of the Gergesenes, a country just east of the Jordan river. Matthew illustrates that the power of Jesus' word is cosmic. To demonstrate this, he relates the Master in action calming a great storm while at sea with the disciples. We are to realize the power of Jesus' word is the same which created the elements.[14] Upon his arrival, he is met by two possessed with devils. In that day demon possession was a very common phenomenon. Apparently Satan had more control over men before Jesus' resurrection. Speaking of this, Paul said that Jesus "*led captivity captive, and gave gifts unto men*" (Eph.4:8). Among these gifts, there is no mention made of *exorcism* (I Cor. 12:4-11). Jesus now has bound Satan by the power of the gospel for a symbolic 1,000 years (Rev. 20:2ff.).

The word that stilled the storm on the Sea of Galilee is now presented as superior to the power of the devils. The devils knew immediately they were no match for the authority of Jesus, so they asked permission to dwell

within pigs, an unclean animal under the Old Testament. "*And he said unto them,* ***Go.***" Because of Jesus' divine authority, they had to obey. Upon entering the swine, they immediately perished by rushing straight into the water. In this we see that the authority of Jesus is superior to all evil forces and that their final judgment is assured by his spoken word.

Swine were considered filthy animals by the Jews and were considered creatures fit for the devils only. Matthew desires all to see the authority in Jesus' command to "Go." The demons must obey the might of the Divine word. Neither will the disobedient have any other choice than obey him when he says to them on that last day "*depart from me.*"

5. Water has been God's dividing line in many tests of faith.

Water was God's dividing line at the great flood, the Red Sea, the Jordan river and now it is seen in *the command for believers to be baptized.* Under the new covenant, Peter used the dividing line between the old and new world at the great flood to illustrate the dividing line between being lost and being saved. Concerning Noah's family, he said: "*Eight souls were saved by water, the like figure whereunto baptism doth also now save us*" (I Pet. 3:21). Paul refers to Israel's escape from Egypt through the Red Sea as their "baptism unto Moses" (I Cor. 10:1ff). In his great commission, Jesus said to the apostles: "*Go ye into all the world and preach the gospel to every creature. He that believeth and is baptized shall be saved; but he that believeth not, shall be damned.*"

We have seen that the demons were given permission to inhabit swine, but their entrance caused the animals to lose their senses and perish in the water. This signifies that anyone under the influence of Satan is not in their right mind. Luke says this of the penitent prodigal in Luke 15: "*He came to himself.*" For every believer who desires to obey Jesus' command to go through the waters of baptism, Jesus' commands Satan to "*GO!*" Consequently, the sinner is delivered by having all his past sins perish forever *in the water and the blood* (I Jno.5:6-9). However, let all unbelievers beware who would rush into the water with an ulterior motive. Remember Pharaoh? His army perished in the water like the pigs (Ex. 14:28). Sin finds its dwelling place in the hearts of the unclean, typified by the swine that perished in the water. Its end is always the same—destruction. Like cancer, it feeds upon its own host until both die. It is very significant that the unclean animals perished in water for water baptism is *symbolic* for the cleansing agent of the blood of Christ (Ac. 22:16; Rev. 1:5). Jesus said in Mark 16:16: "*He that believeth and is baptized shall be saved.*" Obedience brings salvation when accepted, but disobedience destroys all who reject his word (Lu. 7:28-29). Sinners are invited to **come** to the water and the blood for salvation. Satan is commanded to **go** from the sinner. He will eventually perish. Destruction eventually comes to all who reject Jesus' mercy.

6. Peter's mother-in-law is healed.

One might wonder why this particular story follows the foregoing events. Matthew's details are not always chronological nor always intended to be. What we must see is the order in which these miracles occur and the spiritual applications intended. After Peter's wife's mother is healed, there is this revealing statement: "*The fever left her:* ***and she arose, and ministered unto them.***" Obviously, what follows mercy extended is a life of grateful service to the Master. One's whole life is to serve him by obeying his word. However, Matthew gives us an example of caution for those who might desire to have Jesus' blessings without enough dedication to suffer for righteousness. He pictures one so excited about the wonders of Jesus that he offers to follow him everywhere. Jesus, however, cautions him with these words intended for all of us to hear:

***The foxes have holes, and the birds have nests; but the Son of man hath not where to lay his head* (Matt. 8:20).**

Jesus told this man plainly that discipleship was more important than material things. A second man also offered to become a disciple, but only after his father's death. The urgency of discipleship is now stated as being greater than caring for one's parents when there are others available who care nothing about following Jesus. Jesus expressed it this way: "*Follow me; and let the dead bury the dead.*" He is saying that *saving the living is greater than burying the dead.*

Now, after reading the account of these miracles, a personal universal invitation is issued to all to become his disciples.

7. Jesus commands the sinner to "come" to him (Matt. 11:28).

The second word of authority mentioned by the centurion was "**come**." Matthew records Jesus issuing this command in a tender appeal to all sinners: "*Come unto me, all ye that labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you, and learn of me; for I am meek and lowly in heart: and ye shall find rest unto your souls. For my yoke is easy, and my burden is light.*[15] All who hear (obey) Jesus' voice are the sheep that will be gathered into his fold."[16] Jesus' invitation to come to him separates his sheep from those of the stranger, for they hear his word and obey. The universality of the kingdom is here stressed again when Jesus declares that he has sheep outside the Jewish fold: "*And other sheep I have not of this fold: them I must also bring, and they shall hear my voice; and there shall be one fold, and one shepherd.*" [17] To those who would not answer his call to come, Jesus said: "*Ye believe not, because ye are not my sheep, as I said unto you. My sheep hear my voice, and I know them, and they follow me.*" The availability of salvation lies in one's ability to recognize the word of Jesus. Recognition of Jesus' invitation to "come" unto him must be followed by surrendering to Jesus as Shepherd of God's sheep. This person will be able to say with David: "*the Lord is my Shepherd, I shall not want.*" [18]

To belong to the Chief Shepherd requires hearing Jesus' command to come, then to promptly obey. Those who disregard the voice ignore the authority of the Master. This separates the heirs of the promises of God from those who desire to follow a stranger. Those who accept the call to come are said to take upon themselves the "yoke of Christ." When these do this, they discover that, although the load is not diminished, the yoke fits smoothly, much easier than the galling yoke of the old life. By accepting the invitation to come to Jesus and submitting to his yoke, the loads of life are made bearable. As can be observed by the centurion's acceptance of the authority of Jesus' word, the door is opened through which God's blessings flow.

God helps believers to "come." In John 6:44-45, these words are spoken by Jesus: "*No man can come to me, except the Father which hath sent me draw him: and I will raise him up in the last day. It is written in the prophets, And they shall all be taught of God. Every man therefore that hath heard and hath learned of the Father, cometh to me.*" In this text Jesus is telling the Jews if they really believe the Old Testament prophecies that spoke of the coming messiah, they will be drawn by the father's word to come to him. As Paul later affirmed, these prophets were "*a schoolmaster to bring us to Christ, that we might be justified by faith.*"[19] God draws one to Christ through his inspired word which he has given (Jno.6:44-45). That word is fulfilled in his Son's invitation to come to him for eternal life. This invitation is as authoritative and powerful as it ever was. Disbelief and selfishness prevent one from being drawn to God's spiritual blessings in Christ (Eph.1:3). The Word of Jesus is super-ior to the demons and is always available when one sincerely desires deliverance from the power of sin. When one heeds the invitation to **"Come"** to Jesus, the Lord commands the demons to ***"Go!"*** Without the desire of the

host, Jesus will not permit sin to dwell in a heart that has been cleansed by his blood.

The writer of Hebrews records the amazing power of Jesus' word in these words: "For *the word of God is quick, and powerful, and sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing even to the dividing asunder of soul and spirit, and the joints and the marrow, and is a discerner of the thoughts and the intents of the heart.*" [20] In the very first verse of Hebrews, the writer emphasizes the authority of Jesus' spoken word: "*God, who at sundry times and diverse manners spake in times past unto the fathers by the prophets, hath in these last days spoken unto us by his son, who he hath appointed heir of all things, by whom also he made the worlds.*" E. R. Latta penned it this way:

Come to Jesus, dying sinner!
Other Saviour there is none;
He will share with you his glory,
When your pilgrimage is done.

The Almighty saw no better way to close his library of Books containing the scheme of man's redemption than this: "*The spirit and the bride say,* ***Come****. And let him that is athirst* ***come.*** *And whosoever will, let him take of the water of life freely*" *(Rev. 22).*

8. The servant is to "do" the will of the master. (Matt. 12)

Another word of authority the centurion used was **"do**." "I say to this servant, **do** this and he doeth it," he said. Matthew emphasizes this important aspect for discipleship in the Sermon on the Mount. He records Jesus saying: "*Not every one that sayeth unto me, Lord, Lord, shall enter into the kingdom of heaven; but he that* ***doeth*** *the will of my Father in heaven.*" [21] Luke records it this way: "*Why call ye me, Lord, Lord, and* ***do not*** *the things which I say?*" [22]

In a powerful emphasis of this, Matthew speaks of an incident in the teaching of Jesus where the authoritative "**do**" is used to identify the true spiritual family of Jesus. Jesus riled the Pharisees by allowing his hungry disciples to gather grain to eat on the Sabbath (Matt. 12). Jesus entered a Synagogue where he healed a man of a withered hand. This further incensed them to the point that they sought to kill him. Jesus was not intimidated and again healed a man possessed with a devil. He was both blind and mute.* The Pharisees could not deny a miracle had been performed; it was too evident before their eyes, but they charged Jesus of performing these merciful acts on the Sabbath by the power of "Beelzebub, the prince of devils." Jesus accused them of being a "generation of vipers" and an adulterous and evil generation.

This great teaching session was interrupted by Jesus' earthly family. His mother and brethren wanted to speak to him about a private matter. When he was told that his family wished to speak to him, Jesus seized the opportunity to teach a major lesson on the

* Jesus enables one both to see the light and hear the truth. Israel will do neither.

1. "**Come** unto me"(Jesus, Matt. 11:28.).
2. "What shall we **do**" (Pentecostians, Ac. 2:37.)?
3. "Repent and be baptized, everyone of you . . . for the remission of your sins" (Apostle Peter, Ac. 2:38).

identity of his spiritual family. Matthew seems to insert it precisely at this point to demonstrate in his pyramidical theme that *only by hearing the word of Jesus can one be a member of God's family.*

The interruption was used by Jesus to make this point when He asked: "*Who is my mother? and who are my brethren? And he stretched forth his hand toward his disciples and said, Behold my mother and my brethren! For whosoever shall* ***do*** *the will of my Father in heaven, the same is my brother, and sister, and mother.*"[23]

The "***doer*** *of the Father's will,*" is the positive response which identifies one as a member of the family of God, the kingdom of heaven (Matt. 7:21; Ac. 2:37ff.).

C. SUMMARY

We have reviewed the centurion's three words of authority. Bear in mind that Matthew is revealing essential details involved in the process of entering the new kingdom. These authoritative commands are spoken by Jesus and must be heard and obeyed by the sinner:

1. Go! This represents the absolute power of the Word of God over Satan. When this word is spoken to him by our Lord, coupled with the desire of the sinner, he must leave. The herd of unclean swine represents a suitable habitation for unclean spirits, yet even their unclean habitation was destroyed. Hence, cleansed sinners will be saved and the habitation of devils will be judged and eventually destroyed.

2. Come! This is the word of command that always separates those willing to hear and obey our Lord's word from those who refuse to hear it.[24] "Come" is the "inviting word" from Jesus. When obeyed, it has behind it the power of God to separate the acceptable "clean" from the unacceptable "defiled." John the Baptist says this of Jesus: "*Whose fan is in his hand, and he will thoroughly purge his floor, and gather his wheat into the garner; but he will burn the chaff with unquenchable fire.*"[25] The invitation to accept the blood atonement at thecross is now being extended by his church to the entire world. Through preaching the blessed gospel, it pleads for the unsaved to heed his authoritative command: "***Come*** *unto me, all ye that labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest.*"[26]

3. Do! Membership in the spiritual family is confined to those who obey this command. Neither the mother of Jesus nor his brethren were to be considered his spiritual family on the basis of fleshly kinship. This underscores the point that none is a child of God simply because he is related to Abraham by a fleshly birth. Jesus' earthly family, along with all others who desire citizenship in the Kingdom, must submit to the rule of the kingdom—that of "doing" the will of the Father, in heaven.[27]

Now notice the progressive and orderly way in which Matthew reveals the power of Jesus' word in chapter 8.

(a) *Matt. 8:1-3. These verses reveal Jesus' healing word for the Jews.* The word of mercy is extended to the Jews first, according to the divine plan (Rom. 1:16).

(b) *Matt. 8:5-13. These verses contain Christ's healing power for the Gentiles.* The word of mercy is extended to the Gentiles immediately after it is offered to the Jews, as according to the divine plan (Rom. 1:16).

(c) *Matt. 8:14-15. These verses show gratitude for having received grace as well as the central purpose of a blessed life.* Upon being healed, Peter's mother-in-law arose and "*ministered unto him*" (RV). This is the grateful response all should have who have been spiritually healed by the word of God. Jesus explains later that this is done by ministering to others in need (Matt. 25:35-46).

(d) *Matt. 8:19-20. These verses illustrate that the awesome miraculous healing power of the Word of God must not be sought for personal gain.* Later, Simon Magnus made this terrible mistake and was severely rebuked for it (Acts 8).

(e) *Matt. 8:21-22. The mission of extending the mercy of God to the living is more urgent than the need to care for a dying parent when arrangements can be made with unbelievers to do so.* If one is not prepared to make such a sacrifice, he would later choose his family over his discipleship in a difficult situation.

(f) *Matt. 8:23-27. In these verses Jesus stills a storm by his word. Only God can command the elements.* The power of the Word of Jesus is the power that created the worlds. Matthew is guiding all toward the decision that Jesus is no less than the omnipotent God who framed the worlds.

(g) *Matt. 8:28-34. We are to see here that Jesus' authority can bring deliverance to the most hopeless victims under the bondage of Satan.* Jesus' mercy is extended to the saddest, most pitiful and hopeless case of sin filled people on earth. For the demoniac in our text there is no hope, but Jesus effectively delivers him. There is no sinner, regardless of the magnitude of his sins, who would worship Jesus and confess his authority who cannot be saved.

The Gergesenes have left us a pathetic example of a materialistic people *who loved their pigs more than the mercy of God.* Is not the stock market the bottom line that controls much of the world today? Each one who comes face to face with Jesus' offer of mercy and his promise of life is immediately confronted with the Gergesene problem: *How much is it going to cost me?* And just here, each must determine just what they love most, temporal possessions or eternal life. The Gergesenes decided in favor of their pigs. Sadly, many still cannot pay the price of giving up the unclean for the clean.

Matthew continues his pyramidical presentation in chapter 9 regarding Jesus' power to forgive sins. The reader is being led to discover that the powerful word spoken by Jesus that subdued demons and caused the elemental forces of nature to bow in submission, is none other than God in action in Jesus. The next step (recorded in chapter 9) is to reveal that his divine authority also has the power to *forgive man's sins and recreate his fallen nature.* If Jesus' word created all things, commands and sustains all things, then he has authority and power to forgive his creature the sins he has committed. The Word of Jesus which made the heart and soul can heal the inner man's spirit as well as the outer man's body.

Forgiving people's sins brought the charge of blasphemy from the scribes. Only God, they said, could forgive sins. They were right, but were blinded. They could not tolerate Jesus' disregard for their religious commentaries on the law. This blinded them to the mercy of God in Jesus' healing power. If Jesus had not truly been the Son of God, they would have had a point. A mere man would have been guilty of blasphemy (or insanity) if he presumed to make himself equal with God. Jesus backed his claims of deity with omnipotent power and a sinless life. *The scribes were confronted with a moral decision that had to be made on the basis of what they saw in Jesus.* We must make a similar choice on the basis of what we read about Jesus. The obvious could not be denied by them, so they hardened themselves against the truth. He was a fulfillment of the prophesies which they had studied all their lives. They insisted he was only another false messiah, even though no man had ever made such claims as Jesus nor fol2lowed through with such incontrovertible evidence that proved his claims to be true. "*What think ye of Jesus?*" is a moral question from which there is no escape. Matthew is asking for one to be fair with his evidence and testimony concerning Jesus as being the Christ, the Son of God.

The scribes and Pharisees saw vividly with their own eyes the reality of the power unleashed in the spoken Word of Jesus—the divine power that extended mercy and grace for those in need.

They faced this moral decision: Who was this extending mercy and grace? Was he actually who he claimed to be, the Son of God? Or was he possessed by demons? But if he were demon possessed, would he perform such acts of mercy and goodness? And, would he magnify God by giving him the glory for his works? They had miracles of goodness worked before their eyes that none could deny, yet they made the decision that Jesus' body was the habitation of devils, even by Beelzebub the prince of devils.

This is what stubbornness and prejudice will force one to do. If these men had accepted Jesus' merciful signs as from God, then they had to accept his claims of Deity. They could not bring themselves to do this because Jesus posed a direct threat to their cherished traditions. The priesthood was an impressive and lucrative business, so they were forced to reject him as an evil man.

The religious professionals did not charge Jesus of faking the miracles he performed. With positive evidence before everyone's eyes, they knew this would not work. Also, John the Baptist was considered a prophet and he had endorsed him. What the common people had seen and experienced, the Sanhedrin could not deny. Yet, one of its high officials was willing to admit it.[28] Others chose the foolish position of admitting that he truly performed deeds of goodness and mercy, but that his power to do this was demonic.[29]

In their efforts to dissuade the spiritual-minded from believing in Jesus, their argument could not have been weaker nor more utterly defenseless. It was a pathetic statement by deeply stubborn people. Jesus answered their accusation with these words: "*Every kingdom divided against itself is brought to desolation; and every city or house divided against itself shall not stand; and if Satan cast out Satan, he is divided against himself; how shall then his kingdom stand?*"

And, because some of their own claimed power to cast out demons as well, Jesus added this onerous and chafing blow: "*And if I by Beelzebub cast out devils, by whom do your children cast them out? Therefore, they shall be your judges.*"[30]

Their having reached such a benighted state of mind influenced Jesus to drastically change his method of teaching from this time forward. This will be considered later along with some of the parables.

The moral decision was: Who was this extending mercy and grace? Was he actually who he claimed to be, the Son of God? or was he possessed by demons? But if he was demon possessed, would Jesus perform acts of mercy in the name of God? And, would he claim that God was the power behind his works?

References

1. Romans 1:16
2. Isaiah 60:3; 62:2
3. Matthew 16:18; 3:9-10; John 3:3-8
4. Romans 3:20; 4:1-5
5. Titus 3:9
6. Galatians 3:26ff.
7. Matthew 8:10-12
8. Luke 4:18-29
9. II Kings 5:1ff.
10. Matthew 9:13
11. John 5:9
12. Romans 1:16
13. Matthew 9:4ff.
14. Colossians 1:16; John 1:1ff.
15. Matthew 11:28-29
16. John 10
17. John 10:16
18. Psalm 23
19. Galatians 3:24
20. Hebrews 4:12
21. Matthew 7:21
22. Luke 6:46
23. Matthew 12:46-48
24. John 10. His sheep hear his voice and follow him.
25. Matthew 3:12
26. Matthew 11:29
27. Matthew 7:21
28. John 3:1ff.
29. Matthew 9:24; 12:25-28
30. *Ibid.*

Questions for Chapter Ten

1. How does Matthew picture the order of grace in Matthew, chapter eight?
2. What is the nature of great faith as complemented by Jesus in the same chapter?
3. What did the Gergesenes place above mercy and grace? Discuss evidences of this today?
4. Discuss the three commands of authority pictured in Matthew and how are they seen in Christ?

—Read This—

"God, who at sundry times and in divers manners spake in time past unto the fathers by the prophets, Hath in these last days spoken unto us by his Son, whom he hath appointed heir of all things, by whom also he made the worlds; Who being the brightness of his glory, and the express image of his person, and upholding all things by the word of his power, when he had by himself purged our sins, sat down on the right hand of the Majesty on high . . . ." —Heb. 1:1-3a.

Which Yoke Are You Wearing?

1. The yoke of the slavery to sin (Deut. 28:48; Prov. 5:22)
2. The yoke of bondage to the Law (Gal. 5:1; Acts 15:10)
3. The yoke of Christ (Matt. 11:28-29)
4. The yoke of obedience (Phil. 4:3; 1 Tim. 6:1)
5. The yoke of service (Phil. 4:3; 1 Tim. 6:1)

Outline for Chapter Eleven

How Jesus Taught

I. Jesus States His Authority
   A. "But I say unto you . . ."
   B. The unique approach of Jesus' teaching
   C. Some methods of Jesus' teaching
      1. Jesus lessons were always relevant
      2. Jesus began his lesson with a captivating thought.
      3. Jesus' style, material and presentation were direct and simple
   D. Tools for retention
      1. The epigram
      2. The paradox
      3. The hyperbole
      4. The parable
         (a) Judgement was inevitable upon those whose hearts were closed by hardness
         (b) Jesus used the parable to keep a peaceful environment as long as possible

O MAN EVER SPOKE LIKE THIS MAN!

Chapter Eleven

How Jesus Taught

Sing them over again to me,
Wonderful words of Life;
Let me more of their beauty see,
Wonderful words of Life.
Words of Life and beauty,
Teach me faith and duty:
Beautiful words, wonderful words,
Wonderful words of Life.
—P. P. Bliss

Matt. 6:26-30; 7:24-29; Lu. 4:14-31; Jno. 4:1-14

1. JESUS STATES HIS AUTHORITY

A. "But I Say unto You"

Without a doubt, Jesus was different from all other rabbis of his day. "*Never has any man taught like this man,*" was heard on the streets. He taught with an authority the scribes dared not assume. They always pointed to Moses and to the law as the truth. Jesus, with unflinching frankness, declared, "*I am the truth.*" Regarding the traditional instruction to which the Jews were accustomed, Jesus would say, "You have heard it said." They rejected his claims and argued with him, but they found themselves helpless against the signs he worked openly in the streets of Jerusalem. He declared later, "*in secret, I have done nothing.*"[1] Given any spiritual perception, the divinity of Jesus could be seen by those who heard his instruction and observed the confirmation of his word with miraculous works.

Nicodemus, a Sanhedrin member, was such a man. This nobleman's intelligence noticed an astounding difference between this man's authority and that of the ordinary rabbis. It was the difference that bothered him. This unique authority, signified by the miracles he worked, drove Nicodemus to seek out Jesus at night for a private interview concerning the astonishing things he had observed earlier in the day. This judge may have been seeking a more convenient time when he could inquire of Jesus aside from the distractions of the crowd. Or it might have been that he did not care to be seen by his colleagues of the Sanhedrin. No one really knows for sure why he came at night. One thing is evident, he sought a private audience with Jesus to inquire further about the miracles which had attracted his interest on the streets.

Nicodemus opened the evening discus-

sion by immediately giving Jesus his evaluation of the miraculous works he had seen Jesus perform earlier in the day: *"We know thou art a teacher come from God,"* the Jewish nobleman said.[2] These words reflect the judgment of millions of pious souls throughout the centuries. It seems remarkable that, regardless of sin being so dominant in every generation, and the slothfulness of evangelism in the church, even under these tremendous handicaps Jesus' teaching still has a captivating influence unlike all other.

B. The unique approach of Jesus' teaching

Jesus stands out majestically unique as "The Teacher" of the world. Students of the Gospel consistently notice the great amount of time and energy our Lord devoted to his instruction. The minds of his disciples needed to be cleared of all the traditional rubbish centuries of rabbinical instruction had deposited there. Such mental purging is still needed, but most difficult to accomplish. Only the truth can make men free;[3] but one must be hospitable to the truth.

For example, Bethlehem was overcrowded when Jesus came into the world. Because of these overcrowded conditions, there was no room for him in the inn. But similar overcrowding can also saturate one's mind. It can be so stuffed with the litter of traditional debris that it leaves no room for the truth of Jesus. If inhospitable to the truth, one can not be made free. Jesus had come to reveal himself as the pure Word of God. The Bible issues solemn anathemas against those who would pervert the truth as revealed in Jesus.

Regarding this, Paul wrote the Galatians: *". . . There be some that trouble you, and would pervert the Gospel of Christ, but though we, or an angel from heaven, preach any other Gospel unto you than that we have preached unto you, let him be accursed."* [4]

This condemns any self-serving interpretation that attempts to make any and all interpretations of equal importance. *"Knowing this first,"* Peter declared, *"that no prophecy of the scripture is of private interpretation."*[5] Holy men of God did not write their personal viewpoints when they penned the Bible, but they were "moved"—inspired by the Holy Spirit—to write unerringly the will of God. If they were so bound by the Spirit to write only what God wanted everyone to hear, then there is only one interpretation permitted by the reader—the meaning God intended it to convey through the prophet's pen. This is the only true interpretation. Those who would render any other meaning, sincere as they may be, are only sincerely wrong. Others could be guilty of purposefully wresting the Scriptures, an awesome sin mentioned by Peter in his Second Epistle.[6]

C. Some methods of Jesus' teaching

Both sincere students and dedicated instructors of Christianity are vitally interested in our Lord's teaching methods. They will find several areas in Jesus' method of instruction which will prove extremely beneficial if personally mastered.

It is helpful to learn Jesus' method for gaining an audience as well as the arrangement and presentation of his material. Personal application in these areas is indispensable to becoming an effective disciple of his truth. It leads one into a deep communion with the spiritual world without which no one is qualified to speak. Ezekiel, contemplating the dry audience and the preaching task to which he was called, said, *"the hand of the Lord is upon me"* (Ezekiel 37). This inward feeling of the presence of God and the need for his help is crucial for a successful ministry.

Observe now, that Jesus gained and kept his audience by using the most basic common sense.

1. Jesus' lessons were always relevant.

Jesus quickly captured the attention of his audience. He did this by making sure his lessons hit home immediately. He did not seek to gain and hold attention by the use of gimmicks, like displaying live exotic animals around him as some have done in some places of worship today. Neither did he dazzle crowds by handling poisonous snakes while chanting incoherent gibberish. He rejected such theatrics in the second wilderness temptation.

Most of Jesus' teaching was outdoors. Those who always preach inside have captive audiences. Out of respect, few will leave even if bored to agony.

Gathering and keeping an outside audience in informal groups as Jesus did, has always been difficult. How did he manage this?

2. Jesus used practical illustrations that struck home in every listener's heart.

Anyone could immediately identify with the opening remarks of Jesus' message. Whether they were willing to accept them or not, a listener readily knew that the opening words struck home in his heart. He may reject the lesson, even mock or persecute Jesus, but he was never left indifferent to what was said.[7] His first sermon in Nazareth in Luke 4:18ff. serves as an example. In this he said: "*The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he hath anointed me to preach the Gospel to the poor; he hath sent me to heal the broken hearted, to preach deliverance to the captives, and recovering of sight to the blind, to set at liberty them that are bruised, to preach the acceptable year of the Lord.*" Immediately, the Bible says, "*the eyes of all them that were in the synagogue were fastened upon him.*" With this kind of introduction, everyone was awaiting the rest of the sermon. Later they did not like it, but he gained and kept their attention by a good introduction. Some application of this would be appropriate for a new minister assuming his duties in a local work with a congregation.

3. Jesus began his lessons with a captivating thought.

Not only does much of today's religious teaching fail to attract attention at the beginning, it remains stale and spiritually unchallenging throughout its presentation. The first five minutes of instruction are vital in a preacher's message. In this brief time one can win the attention of his listeners or lose it. Once lost, it is difficult to regain.

With the very first word Jesus struck directly at his listeners personal interests. His subject was never based on the latest political bulletins from Rome or latest revisions in philosophy. Neither did he resort to theatrics for applause. No one came away from one of Jesus' lessons without having been stirred. Even though some rejected his lessons, even mocked them, and tried to prevent others from hearing and obeying them, no one could remain indifferent.

4. Jesus' style, material, and presentation were direct and simple.

Jesus not only began with a captivating thought, he also kept his lessons within the grasp of the poor, uneducated, and common man. This does not mean that added instruction was never needed in order to grasp the deeper spiritual applications he intended to communicate. The blind man in John 9 needed further instruction, but he clung to the "one thing" he knew until he was blessed with deeper understanding. Those who have "*eyes to see and ears to hear*" are frequently motivated to seek a deeper explanation, like the disciples after hearing the great parable of the sower (See Matthew 13).

For the further inquiring soul, Jesus always provides a fuller understanding of his will through additional extensive study of his word. Peter was a bit slow in understanding Jesus' instruction on defilement, yet the message left him intensely inquisitive![8]

Although Jesus had the creative word of the world at his command, he made no use of high sounding orations nor spoke in unintelligible jargon to impress his audience. Some of the early church members were blessed by what the King James Version speaks of as "*unknown tongues*" (I Cor. 14:2,4, 13, 14, 19 and 27). It should be noticed that the word "*unknown*" appears in italics. The translators signify by this that this word is not in the original language. They have written it in italics to tell the reader it has been supplied by themselves for smoother reading. According to Vine's, *Expository Dictionary of New Testament Words,* page 141, the Greek word glossa, translated "tongue," means language. Note Paul's statement in I Corinthians 14:8-9: "*For if the trumpet give an uncertain sound, who shall prepare himself unto battle? So likewise ye, except ye utter by the tongue words easy to be understood, how shall it be known what is spoke? for ye shall speak into the air.*" Vine says it is "*the supernatural gift of speaking in another language without its having been learnt.*" He adds, "*there is no evidence that this gift continued after apostolic times.*"

Preaching in a manner just to impress an audience using flamboyant rhetoric or to have someone gasp at a sermon's close: "Wasn't that a great presentation," is unbecoming of Gospel preachers (Col. 2:8). The only acceptable reason for teaching the Gospel is to communicate the truth.[9] This is not to say that nothing must be found arresting about the teacher's presentation, but one must avoid at all costs self glory as the basic motive for speaking. Oratory with splashes of volcanic eruptions along with constant novel alliterations would be better reserved for after dinner speeches, etc., where the speaker can be properly rewarded by a ringing applause. However, the worship assembly is being turned more and more into a theatre where the star is rewarded with a big applause for a great performance.

A few have been masters with the appropriate use of wit in sermons to emphasize serious points. However, the primary source for their respect is their practical biblical preaching, sprinkled sparingly with a moderate use of humor. Jesus held the attention of his listeners because his lessons communicated to man's personal need—not because he entertained them with cute expressions. If one's train of thought is lost while reading, one may retrace a sentence, but it is difficult to do this while listening to a sermon. If a listener pauses to examine the meaning of something the teacher has said, his continuity is lost and there stands a good chance that the following portion of the message will either be lost or badly misunderstood.

It has been the experience of many preachers to be accused of saying something in their sermon they did not say at all. Episodes of mind drifting can occur frequently during a sermon. These episodes can be extremely dangerous as the mind skips here and there throughout the sermon, omitting a word or phrase that is absolutely critical to a correct understanding of the theme. More than once, worshippers have been known to link disjointed sentences in a sermon because they allowed their minds to hopscotch about. Conclusions totally opposite from which the speaker conveyed can be formulated in this manner. This simple presentation of Jesus' material did not subtract from the richness and depth in his principles of life. Some of his lessons are significantly beyond any total comprehension of man.

The story of the rich man and Lazarus is a good example of this; his message on impending judgment in Matthew 24 is another. Jesus did use an abundance of metaphors which people could always fully grasp. The intriguing thing about many of his presentations is that seemingly simple passages can cause the mind to spin with their profound spiritual implications. The messages may seem very simple on the surface and on that level rewarding. However, a discovery of much greater depth can come after careful study and meditation over the years. Jesus'

messages never soared off into celestial orbits of elocution, punctuated with combustible rhetoric just to impress the audience with his power of verbosity.

A sample of his down-to-earth, but profound teaching, is in the expression, "*I and My Father are one.*"[10] While extremely plain, it is in no way simplistic. It is quite easy to understand its surface meaning, but its profundities are mind-boggling and defy complete explanation. However, just keeping one's style, material, and presentation simple, will not always insure that everyone will leave the premises perfectly instructed at the close of the sermon. Good preaching, however, sometimes leaves the pious mind anxious for further explanation of what it did not fully grasp.

Jesus' lessons had universal appeal. He presented lessons that were for everyone. In the block below, concerning this, William Barclay has written:

One of the most amazing characteristics of Jesus as a teacher was the universality of his appeal. We find him teaching in the synagogues. We find him teaching in the Temple at Jerusalem. We find him engaged in technical arguments and discussion with the foremost scholars of his day. We find him in the streets and on the roads, using a fishing-boat as a pulpit; by the seashore, holding the crowds spellbound with his words. We find him teaching the intimate circle of the disciples, and yet we find that amidst the crowds the people heard him gladly. This is extraordinary teaching.[11]

D. Retention Tools

Jesus used various methods to keep his lessons invigorating in the minds of his hearers. Following are several of the approaches Jesus used.

1. The epigram.

Jesus used a lot of catchy phrases. This important feature of Jesus' instruction helped make his lessons unforgettable. One must try hard to forget such phrases as: "*For Whosoever will save his life shall lose it: And Whosoever will lose his life for my sake will find it.*"[12] This method of communication is called an epigram. Jesus was a master at its use. His catchy phrases were always filled with thought provoking material. Other examples of his use of the epigram are: "*For every one that exalteth himself shall be abased; and he that humbleth himself shall be exalted,*"[13] and "*For what is a man profited, if he shall gain the whole world, and lose his own soul? Or what shall a man give in exchange for his own soul?*"[14]

2. The paradox.

The paradox *was another instrument in Jesus' presentation.* The beatitudes in Matthew are filled with paradoxes. It was Jesus' way of

demonstrating what seemed impossible by fleshly standards was fully obtainable in the Spirit. For example, meekness is commonly considered a sign of weakness. It is contrary to some thinking that a meek person would have enough muscle to inherit much of anything, especially the earth. In addition to the beatitudes, another good illustration of Jesus' use of the paradox is given in Matthew 18:3 in these words: "*Except ye become as little children, ye shall not enter into the* kingdom of heaven." This, in a stroke, blasts all the pomp, power, and personal lust for social prestige into oblivion.

3. The hyperbole.

The hyperbole is an overstatement used to arrest attention of the seriousness of the matter under consideration. It is used to make a person stop and think. Think of how thought provoking this statement is: "*And if thy hand offend thee, cut it off: for it is better for thee to enter into life maimed, than having two hands to go to hell, into the fire that never shall be quenched.*"[15] Jesus used the hyperbole often. One of the most vivid examples of Jesus' use of this method is found in Luke 14:26: "*If any man come to me, and hate not his father, and mother, and wife, and children, and brethren, and sisters, yea, and his own life also, he cannot be my disciple.*"

Such thought provoking hyperboles have provoked discussion in every generation. It measures temporary suffering for righteousness against eternal agony after death. It is calculated to make one think before he dies in sin and faces the judgment. John used the hyperbole at the close of his Gospel as a point of emphasis. In John 21:35, he writes: "*And there are many other things which Jesus did, the which, if they should be written every one, I suppose that even the world itself could not contain the books that should be written.*"

4. The parable.

The word in the Old Testament is from the Hebrew *mashal.* Its root meaning is "to be alike." In New Testament Greek it means to "place beside" for the purpose of making a comparison. This was by far the most enduring and memorable method Jesus used in his teaching. Jesus used the parable in his teaching so effectively that even after the passing of twenty centuries, to merely think of the word "parable" is to think of Jesus and the New Testament.

Still, parables had been around for a long time before Jesus (Isaiah 5, is one example), but no one had ever used them so dramatically. He amazed his audience with its use on a high literary and ethical level to convey deep spiritual import. Matthew 13 is so filled with this type of instruction it has been referred to as the great parabolic chapter. With the introduction of the parable, Jesus begins a new phase in his ministry during which he is both revealing and hiding the truth, depending upon the attitude of a hearer's heart.

From the beginning of Jesus' ministry, a dual theme of belief and unbelief can be traced in the Gospel narratives, each running concurrently and progressively among those who heard Jesus and saw the signs which confirmed his word. While the discovery of Jesus' identity by the disciples does not occur until Matthew 16:18 near the coasts of Caesarea Philippi, the hardening process in the hearts of unbelievers may be observed to have reached its climax a bit earlier (Matt. 9-13). The Jewish opposition either could not, or would not, connect the miracles of Jesus with his authoritative claim to forgive sins. Only God could forgive sins.[16] How right they were and how close they were to the truth. Yet, how far away they were at the same time. They would not permit themselves to see God in Jesus in the many merciful deeds he worked. Even though they were at a loss to explain the obvious merciful miracles Jesus did, they refused to acknowledge God as their source.

A few intelligent and reasonable people like Nicodemus were willing to admit that only God could perform such miracles as Jesus worked. Yet, most others were so entrenched in traditional religious beliefs that they found it quite impossible to make any

change in their positions, even if it forced them into the unreasonable contradiction of attributing Jesus' good deeds to Satan. This type of personality which so stubbornly persecuted Jesus without due cause still persists, displaying the same blindness. It often rears its ugly head when someone has courage enough to biblically demonstrate how far modern Christendom has drifted from its original moorings in Christ.

By the time the events happened in Matthew 9, Jesus' popularity was so high that his opposition felt forced to give some explanation for his indisputable signs and miracles. Governed only by a natural mind,[17] they resorted to deep prejudice. In their efforts to close the public's mind against Jesus, they forsook all common reasoning and denounced his miracles as work of the demons, diabolic deeds straight from Beelzebub, the prince of demons himself. Their extreme prejudice is observed in that they readily made this claim even though the miracles of Jesus were all deeds of goodness, compassion, love, and mercy. One may think with all the Jewish holy scriptures before them, *how could those who professionally studied the scrolls reach such a conclusion?* But before we become too judgmental, we must explain similar hardness today.

The Pharisees and Sadducees viewed Jesus as a trouble maker. He rocked the prestigious boat of leadership which they commanded. They viewed him as a direct threat to their personal ambitions. It is no wonder, then, that they went to any lengths to discredit him. They were guided by a type of personality which still haunts a society which practices the philosophy: "If you can't win the argument by honest rebuttal, maliciously poison people's minds against your opponent." An excellent example of this is found in Acts 14:2 where Luke records the following words about the unbelieving Jews: "*But the unbelieving Jews stirred up the Gentiles, and made their minds evil affected against the brethren.*" Truth is of no concern to those who resort to this evil tactic. When the minds of those opposing Jesus became so hardened that they attempted to persuade the people that his mercy was from the devil, there was no hope left for them. They had sinned against the Holy Spirit which was not to be forgiven in this world, nor in the world to come.

God is a forgiving God, and Jesus died illustrating this, saying, "*Forgive them,*

"Go ye therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you; and lo, I am with you always, to the close of the age."
—Matt. 28:19-20, RSV

Father, for they know not what they do." But forgiveness is only available for those who have the capacity to see the goodness of God. It is the "goodness of God" that leads men to repentance, Paul preached to the Corinthians.[18] But what if a person allows prejudice, selfishness, and envy to blind him to God's goodness in Christ? The drawing power of God through Jesus Christ would be annihilated through self-determination.

Concerning such people, the writer of Hebrews penned these words: "*For it is impossible for those who were once enlightened, and have tasted of the heavenly gift, and were made partakers of the Holy Ghost, and have tasted the good word of God, and the powers of the world to come; If they shall fall away, to renew them again unto repentance; seeing they crucify to themselves the Son of God afresh, and put him to an open shame.*"[19]

Peter is equally clear along this line in II Peter 2:20-21, saying: "*For if after they have escaped the pollutions of the world through the knowledge of the Lord and Saviour, Jesus Christ, they are again entangled therein, and overcome, the latter end is worse with them than the beginning. For it would have been better for them not to have known the way of righteousness, than, after they have known it, to turn from the holy commandment delivered unto them.*"

(a) *Judgment was inevitably upon those whose hearts were closed by hardness.* The saving power of the Gospel had been completely shut out by them, making themselves irredeemable by the grace that is in Jesus. In this hardened frame of mind, no saving truth can permeate the heart. They had reached the ultimate hardness of heart which renders the heart and conscience insensitive to personal sin, therefore they could speak blasphemously against the obvious mercy of God in Jesus, saying that such goodness was Satanic. This should be a grave warning to those who would dare speak against the Bible or maliciously against Christ's church, his bride.

One might persecute the church in ignorance and obtain mercy, even as the apostle Paul;[20] but extreme prejudice persisted in, and cherished, can usher in such utter blindness that no amount of reasoning or good deeds performed before one's eyes can evoke repentance.[21] There can be no more hope for such people today than for those who grew so cold in Jesus' day. Looking beyond his own lifetime, Jesus remarked of some cold hearted people saying: "*and because iniquity shall abound, the love of many shall wax cold*" (Matt. 24:12ff.). Blasphemy, speaking against the goodness of the Holy Spirit, in whatever presence he manifests himself, is not a sin that is unpardonable due to the inefficiency of the atoning blood of Jesus. To the sorrow of God, it is unforgivable because a state of hardness has been reached that renders the heart impervious to truth and mercy. Such souls will not permit themselves to admit obvious truth, or turn and be converted.

After his sin with Bathsheba, fearing that such a calloused state of conscience might creep over him, David fervently prayed: "*Take not the Holy Spirit from me.*"[22] This is an indispensable gift of God. It is sad that one would want to throw it away so carelessly. David hoped that his sin had not driven from him all sensitiveness to evil. It would be well if all prayed the same prayer. Personal sins can embed themselves deeply in our souls, destroying all sensitiveness in the conscience. As Jeremiah declared: "*Were they ashamed when they had committed abomination? Nay, they were not at all ashamed, neither could they blush: therefore, they shall fall among them that fall: at the time that I visit them, they shall be cast down, saith the Lord.*"[23]

In an attempt to gain entry to a person's heart, Jesus stands at the door and knocks, but he will not force himself inside against one's will. Those who stubbornly refused to repent and had rather attribute the goodness of God to Satan than the Holy Spirit, received this rebuke from Jesus: "*Ye generation of vipers.*"[24] This was not spoken in vengeance. It is stating the reason for their inability to accept Jesus' works of mercy as divine.

In commenting upon such hardness of

heart, Jesus said: "*While ye have the light, believe in the light, that ye may be the children of light. These things spake Jesus, and departed, and hid himself from them.*"[25] John adds the following analysis for the Jews' unbelief: "*But though he had done so many miracles before them, yet they believed not on him: that the saying of Esaias the prophet might be fulfilled, which he spake, Lord, who hath believed our report? And to whom hath the arm of the Lord been revealed? Therefore, they could not believe, because that Esaias said again, He hath blinded their eyes, and hardened their heart; that they should not see with their eyes, nor understand with their heart, and I should heal them.*" John says there is no hope for those who have allowed the last flickering light of divine truth to vanish from their souls.

How is all this discussion on the condition of one's heart relevant to Jesus' parables? Note that parables are introduced by Jesus after an emphasis has been made on reaching the ultimate hardening of the Pharisee's heart in the immediate preceding chapters of Matthew 13. The disciples noticed Jesus' abrupt change in his method of teaching and inquire why he had switched from his straight forward manner of instruction to the parable. Jesus' answer was this:

> *Because it is given unto you to know the mysteries of the kingdom of heaven, but to them it is not given. For whosoever hath, to him it shall be given, and he shall have more in abundance: but, whosoever hath not, from him shall be taken away even that he hath. Therefore, speak I to them in parables: because they, seeing, see not; and in hearing, they hear not, neither do they understand. And, in them is fulfilled the prophecy of Esaias, which saith, By hearing, ye shall hear, and shall not understand; and seeing, ye shall see, and shall not perceive: For this people's heart is waxed gross, and their ears are dull of hearing, and their eyes they have closed; lest at any time they should see with their eyes, and hear with their ears, and should understand with their heart, and should be converted, and I should heal them,* and then our Lord adds, *But, blessed are your eyes, for they see: and your ears, for they hear*[26]

So, by the use of parables Jesus could speak publicly about his wonderful truths concerning the kingdom of heaven to those with clean hearts, and at the same time not cast his "pearls before the swine"—the swine being those with unclean hearts who would, upon hearing his plain teaching, seek his death prematurely.

(b) *Jesus used the parable to keep a peaceful instructional environment as long as possible.* It is obvious from many passages that Jesus had determined to gain time against his death by instructing in parables. On occasion, when asked to perform a sign, Jesus would reply: "*My time has not yet come.*"[27] He needed sufficient time to teach more fully those who had "ears to hear" about the kingdom. For this he needed as peaceful an environment as possible. He needed precious time to secure in his disciples sufficient faith to withstand the upcoming crucifixion in Jerusalem. He adopted the parable form of teaching which uniquely provided a means by which those who had "ears to hear" and "eyes to see" could be exposed to the truth and, at the same time, not unduly provoke the opposing Jews to kill him before his time to go to the cross. If Jesus had continued to teach them openly that his word was superior to Moses and to ignore their cherished traditions regarding the Sabbath, it could have intensified their wrath and precipitated his murder long before his instructional period was completed. By introducing the parable, the hardening process in the hearts of his opponents was sufficiently delayed. This provided the essential time to prepare his disciples for his death.

References

1. John 18:20
2. John 3:1ff
3. John 8:32
4. Galatians 1:8-9
5. II Peter 1:20
6. II Peter 3:16
7. Matthew 15:12
8. Matthew 15:15
9. John 8:32; Galatians 1:8-9; II John 9-11
10. John 10:30
11. William Barclay. p. 90. *Op. cit.,* page 166
12. Matthew 16:25
13. Luke 18:14
14. Matthew 16:26
15. Mark 9:43
16. Mark 2:5-7
17. I Corinthians 2:14
18. Romans 2:4
19. Hebrews 6:4-6
20. I Timothy 1:13
21. Matthew 12:31
22. Psalm 51:11
23. Jeremiah 6:15
24. Matthew 12:34
25. John 12:36
26. Matthew 13:11-16
27. John 2:4

Supplementary Readings

Barclay, William, *The Mind of Christ,* (New York, Harper and Row) 1960. pp. 89-97.

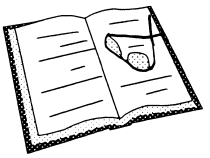
Holdcroft, L. Thomas, *The Four Gospels,* (Sumas, Washington, CeePiCC) 1988. pp. 53-54.

Stewart, James S. *The Life and Teaching of Jesus Christ,* (Nashville, Abingdon Press) n.d. pp. 64-70.

Questions for Chapter Eleven

1. How did Jesus gain and hold the attention of his audience?
2. What are some pitfalls to avoid in trying to attract an audience to hear the Gospel?
3. Name some of the methods Jesus used in his teaching.
4. What means did Jesus use that would help a listener retain his message?

—Read This—



"When Jesus came to the coasts of Caesarea Philippi, he asked his disciples, saying, Whom do men say that I the Son of man am? And they said, Some say that thou art John the Baptist some, Elias; and others, Jeremias, or one of the pro-phets. He saith unto them, But whom say ye that I am? And Simon Peter answered and said, Thou art the Christ, the Son of the living God."

—Matt. 16:13-16

Learn The "Three R's of Salvation

1. *Repentance toward God (Acts 20:21)*
2. *Regeneration of the mind (Titus 3:5)*
3. *Reconciled relationship with God (2 Cor. 5:20)*

Outline for Chapter Twelve

The Amazing Discovery

I. The Church of Christ
  A. A test of faith
  B. Two searching questions
    1. Whom do men say that I am?
    2. Whom say ye that I am?
      a. Peter's response to Jesus
      b. Jesus' response to Peter
      c. The foundation of the church
      d. The gates of hell
      e. The keys of the kingdom
      f. The binding and loosing
      g. God's "faith person" is the "Israelite indeed."
  C. The close of the first phase of Jesus' ministry

Chapter Twelve

The Amazing Discovery

Matthew 16:13-18

I, Petros!
As stone hewn from the mount,
The Christ came forth from God;
Clefted Rock! O flowing fountain!
Crushing nations with his iron rod.

I, a jewel of metamorphic rock?
Faith's miracle appalls!
I, too, Petros? a gilded block,
Laid in New Jerusalem's walls!
—Fenter D. Northern

1. CHRIST'S CHURCH

The Greek word ekklesia, translated church, occurs only in two verses in the Gospels. The word is used in Matthew 16:18 and is repeated twice in 18:17 making a total of three times for its occurrence. This scant use of the word in the Gospels has led some scholars to make the conjecture that even these three references are later insertions by over-zealous church officials seeking scriptural authority for the extension of ecclesiastical control. F. J. Hort calls our attention to this thought in his work entitled, "The Christian Ecclesia," a short essay he prepared a few years ago for Christianity Today.[1] However, there is nothing in the context to warrant such a conclusion as this. The text follows "*When Jesus came into the coasts of Caesarea Philippi, he asked his disciples, saying, Whom do men say that I, the Son of God, am? And Simon Peter answered, and said, Thou art the Christ, the Son of the living God. And, Jesus an-swered and said unto him, Blessed art thou, Simon Bar-jona for flesh and blood hath not revealed it unto thee, but my Father, which is in heaven. And I say also unto thee, Thou art Peter, and upon this rock, I will build my church and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it. And I will give unto thee the keys of the kingdom of heaven And whatsoever*

thou shalt bind on earth shall be bound in heaven And whatsoever thou shalt loose on earth shall be loosed in heaven."

A. A test of faith

This context is of great importance as it not only points out a test of the disciple's faith, but it is a proof of discipleship for all ages. Caesarea Philippi was situated at the foot of Mount Hermon. After months of demonstrating his divine authority in the presence of his disciples, as well as the multitudes, it is here on the highlands of Hermon that the Master Teacher decided to measure the effectiveness of his teaching upon their hearts. How much had they learned? Did they have the essential insight needed to become the living foundational stones in Christ's new household of God.[2]

> *If the beautiful foundation for the New Jerusalem is to be laid with their names inscribed upon it, as pictured by John, it is imperative that his disciples reach the correct and deep conviction of his divine identity.*[3]

Therefore, this moment at Caesarea Philippi is crucial. As the old builder under the old Mosaical system, Israel had been offered the opportunity of building God's house, but they ignored his presence by breaking their covenant with him.[4] Now they were rejecting Christ, the chief cornerstone upon which the new building was to be built.[5]

The new house of God, the church, must not stumble into the pit of faithlessness as Israel had done. Israel's building fell because Jesus, the interlocking cornerstone for all races, was rejected.[6] They missed his typification in their sacrifices and failed to recognize him in the flesh.[7] The twelve interrogated by Jesus in this text are to be his representatives after his crucifixion. They must have a genuine and abiding faith to accomplish the task before them.

The New Covenant would stand or fall depending upon their performance. They must know his true identity before they could be entrusted with initiating the new order. Jesus felt the time had come, here at the foot of Mount Hermon, to determine exactly to what degree the kingdom had taken hold in their heart and to what extent their faith had developed under his instruction. *They must come to know him as the Son of God.* Jesus desired to know if the sculpturing process taking place within their hearts was fashioning the durable rock essential for the foundation stones in the kingdom of heaven.[8] While they have much more to experience before they become the great men of faith in the post resurrection period, they do pass this early test.

B. Two searching questions

Two questions are placed before these developing disciples, the first was "Whom do men say that I, the Son of man, am?" and the second "But, whom say ye that I am?" We will consider them in order.

1. "Whom do men say that I the Son of man am?"

By "men" Jesus meant the multitude which had beheld his public demonstration of power. It was plain enough that the religious hierarchy thought of him merely as a trouble-making imposter.

Much of the citizenry had been impressed with the divine works of Jesus, but only sufficiently to judge him as a prophet. This inferior assessment lingers. Concerning this, Marcus L. Loane observes:

> *They (the prophets) had been men of steel; they were preachers of righteousness and repentance; they could rebuke kings to their faces and stand alone against the world . . . these prophets had been men of heart; they were preachers of compassion and*

tenderness; they could wish their eyes were fountains of tears to weep for the sins of Israel."[9]

The multitudes differed in opinion concerning the personal identity of Jesus, but they were united in feeling that in some way God was with him. This limited acclaim was not the substantial material from which Jesus could build his church-kingdom. If the apostles had not been educated beyond the humanity of Jesus, they would never have become suitable rocks for the foundation stones in the New Jerusalem. The "rock condition" of heart would be reached only when they recognized Jesus' power as inherent and not acquired; that is, they must acquire a faith superior to believing that God was with Jesus—they must know him as incarnate God manifesting himself before their very eyes in a human body. Any conception less than this would prove inadequate to survive the future extreme tribulations they would experience after they began preaching the gospel.

2. "Whom say ye that I am?"

With this second question Jesus is seeking to determine whether the spiritual material in the disciples' hearts is sand or rock. The correct answer to this question is crucial to their future stability. Though Peter's answer is the only recorded reply, there is no reason to suppose that the question was directed solely to him, or that his answer reflects only his convictions. There is no evidence that the other apostles were in any way astonished at Peter's answer. They certainly did not rebuke him when he gave his answer. *If they had disagreed, they would have surely rebuked him for this blasphemous outburst.*

The entire group had already confessed him as the Son of God at the sea of Tiberius. Why did not Jesus pronounce the blessing in our present text on that earlier occasion? In his commentary on Matthew, Adam Clarke states that the first confession at Tiberius was an outburst from the sailors and not from the disciples.[10]

This interpretation is strained as it gives the sailors more credulity than the apostles. The more likely interpretation would be that the earlier confession was by the disciples, but was much more shallow and limited, being a mutual feeling of deep appreciation for deliverance from the stormy sea that had threatened their lives. Peter's confession at Caesarea Philippi was spontaneous and not accompanied by a miracle. It was from a deeper faith motivated by accumulated experiences of seeing Jesus' mighty works. God had already miraculously revealed the true identity of Jesus—even healing Peter's mother-in-law—and Peter was convinced. Sure, his faith wavered when Jesus was arrested in Gethsemane, but it had not been perfected yet by the resurrection. This was a moment of complete frustration and inadequate knowledge of Jesus' mission. At Caesarea Philippi Peter's faith was genuine.

The earlier confession at Tiberius seems to be spawned by a worshipful gratitude due to having been delivered from extreme peril.[11] The latter confession flows from the deep recesses of the heart. Peter was convinced that Jesus was he whom Isaiah had called Immanuel. He believed that God was "with man," incarnate in Jesus.

(a) *Peter's response to Jesus.* What prompted Peter's outburst of faith? Did the healing of his wife's mother flash before his eyes? Did he recall all those who had been miraculously healed by our Lord at his home on the evening following his mother-in-law's cure?[12] The truth lies in his total past experiences with Jesus on occasions too numerous to list. These experiences enabled God to reveal to Peter in the Spirit what he could never have received in the flesh.[13] Faith was begotten in his heart by the word of God. He wrote about this later in I Peter 1:22-23. He cried out his convictions that denoted a faith capable of transforming his weak character into solid rock. Thus, Jesus pronounced the blessing which all can receive when they discover Jesus' true identity. The experiences that led Peter to this discovery are revealed by Matthew. This will mold them into living stones in the Temple of God (I Pet. 2:5ff.).

(b) *Jesus' response to Peter.* "Thou art Peter." This pronouncement by Christ has been one of the most disputed passages in the New Testament. This seems to be mostly from the result of attempting to read back into the context support for a later contention that had developed over the extension of church authority. In spite of all the confusion that centers around this passage, Jesus' statement to Peter is a very comprehensible declaration.

Peter's confession elicited much joy in the heart of Jesus. He addressed the apostle in the following manner "*And I say also unto thee, That thou art Peter, and upon this rock I will build my church. . . .*" Upon his bubbling confessions of faith, Jesus changed Simon's name to Peter. The word is translated in John 1:42 as a stone, which means a piece of rock detached from a huge boulder.[14] The New Jerusalem was to be built of "lively stones," or spiritual faith rocks.[15] The context reveals more than merely a change of name. A look at the full pronouncement demonstrates the way the word petra (translated rock) is used in the Greek.

In the text, the masculine word petros is used with reference to Peter "I also say unto thee, That thou art Peter (petros, *masculine gender*)." But in the second use of "rock" in the sentence, the gender changes "And upon this *rock* (petra, *feminine* gender) I will build my church . . . ." The switch seems more than a play on words. By this change from the masculine to the feminine gender, the writer could not have been referring to the same object.

Such writing in English would appear something like this "*I say unto thee that thou art Peter, [a man] and upon this rock [a woman], I will build my church.*" The incongruity is apparent.

If an objection is made that Matthew may have written his Gospel in Aramaic, therefore the language argument does not apply, it should also be recalled that there are those who believe Matthew wrote both in Aramaic and Greek, the latter the one handed down to us.[16] The Holy Spirit seems to be illustrating that the faith which Peter exhibited was the rock material upon which he would build his church/kingdom. Everyone entering the church/kingdom must openly manifest the same quality of belief as the rock upon which the church, the house of God, was to be built.[17]

Furthermore, the Bible claims that it is inspired, not just in the sense, but in the sentence, even the very selection of a word (See Gal. 3:16).

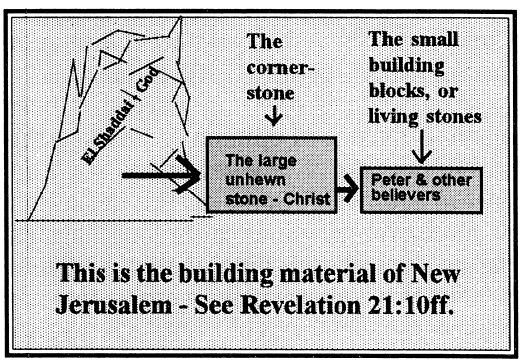
(c) *The foundation of the church.* Earlier in his ministry, Jesus had spoken a parable about a wise man building his house upon a rock which could not be shaken with the force of nature or the passing of time.[18] The "wise man" is one who believes Jesus is the word of God, the stone hewn without hands that came down out of the mountain (Dan. 2:34ff.). By believing and accepting Jesus' teaching, the wise man becomes a living stone hewn from the stone that was hewn from the mountain.[19]

Thus, the new habitation of God is composed of faith people quarried from Christ who came from God. The apostles, the first to believe, became the foundational stones. Later, as they preached the Gospel, all who believed Jesus to be the Christ became living stones in the walls of New Jerusalem, and so on until Jesus returns. This seems clear enough in Matthew 16:18 when viewed with the remainder of the New Testament, especially with I Peter and Revelation. Confusion exists on Matthew 16:18 because devoted advocates of a doctrine that began long after the text was penned have clouded the issue in defense of their theology. In a paraphrase of the text, we have Jesus expressing this idea to Peter: "You were a fleshly son of Abraham by the name of Simon, but now you have been renewed by faith in me as the Seed God promised to Abraham. This renewal by faith makes you worthy of a new name. I will give you the name 'rock' because that reflects the foundation of faith upon which the kingdom of heaven will be built" (See I Pet. 1:21-22).

The heart was the material upon which the new covenant was to be written. Through the transference of faith, Jesus had imparted to Peter a small portion of his own cornerstone quality of heart material—true faith in God.

This is the meaning of Paul who declared that "the righteousness of God (was) revealed from faith to faith."[20] Christ, as the boulder which had been hewn out of the mountain, had instilled a small piece of that great stone securely in Peter's heart through his instruction and miraculous deeds. In Daniel 12, in Nebuchadnezzar's dream, the stone which filled the earth came from a great mountain. Christ, the unhewn stone, was carved from El Shaddai, the mountain that was God. Matthews wants his readers to see that Peter is confessing that Jesus is the stone from the mountain in Nebuchadnezzar's dream. This stone will become the cornerstone of God's New Jerusalem. Peter, and each believer who confesses that Jesus is the Christ as Peter did, will compose the building stones for the new city of God. These lively stones will be faith people from all nations who become rocks by wisely believing Jesus' word. The order can be seen below:

This is the process in action which was



All living stones are carved from the great boulder stone, Christ. Consequently they are of the same spiritual material as he and the mountain. Stones for the construction of new cities were selected from mountains with the most durable rock that could be found. The material for the cornerstone had to be the strongest and hewn into perfect shape as all measurements were made from it for framing and aligning the walls. The stone in Daniel 2, however, was perfect in shape without being hewn by human hands. It is beyond imagination, a miracle indeed, that one would find a perfect foursquare cornerstone from a mountain source that did not have to be hewn square by human hands. This cornerstone that Peter declares to be Jesus in Acts 4:10-12, tumbled down from the mountain into the earth ready to be laid into the corner wall of the new kingdom of heaven.
revealed in Nebuchadnezzar's dream nearly six centuries previously in Daniel 2. The rock cut out of the mountain without hands and which broke in pieces the kingdoms of the earth, was Christ's coming to earth. The nations crushed by the stone represented future believers in Christ, marching into all the earth under obedience to his word. Each new convert would enter the new kingdom of God by making the same confession as Peter made confession of Jesus as God's Son. This is a certification that the confessor's heart has become material Peter calls "lively stone."[21] This is the material Christ uses to construct the new Temple of God.

The new Temple is the church of God.[22] God adds daily all who are being saved to this group.[23] Just as Peter's name was changed to "rock" upon his confession of his faith in Christ, all other confessed believers will be given the name "rock" because their confession of faith in Jesus qualifies them for being placed as living stones in the walls of the new kingdom.

It is interesting to note in Daniel 2, that the beginning of the kingdom of God would be initiated by a great stone being hewn out of *a mountain* and crushing the nations. *El Shaddai* is a Hebrew expression meaning the Almighty God, but it is derived from an old Babylonian word meaning *mountain.*

In an essay in Christianity Today entitled, "God His Nature and Names," Harold B. Kuhn defines El Shaddai this way "*The term is poetic; it is regarded by some scholars, at least, as the Hebrew form of a Babylonian word meaning 'the mountain'.*" [24]

John, in Revelation 21, sees the New Jerusalem with its temple in completed perfection in magnificent beauty. Jesus is the chief corner stone. In Revelation 21 John

sees the apostles as the foundation material. He sees all manner of precious stones in the walls. These are the living stones mentioned by Peter in his epistle. These jeweled stones are faith people throughout the ages (Mal. 3:17). It is an eternal city, one Daniel said that could not be destroyed. This is because it is made of indestructible stone—heart rocks able to endure fiery persecutions. Paul describes these precious stones as "fireproof" (I Cor. 3:17-19). Because of its purifying power, precious material is improved in worth by the application of fire. In the building of the new city of God, Jesus, the corner stone, was laid in New Jerusalem. Each time a faith person repents of sins and is baptized into Christ, he is spiritually mortared into the walls of the building of God connected to the cornerstone.[25] This is why Luke says we are "added daily" to the church.[26] Paul states it this way

> *Now ye are no more strangers, but fellow-citizens with the saints, and of the household of God; And are built upon the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Jesus Christ himself being the chief cornerstone; In whom all the building fitly framed together groweth unto an holy temple in the Lord. In whom ye also are builded together for an habitation of God through the Spirit.*[27]

Once in New Jerusalem, the scheme of redemption is completed and the "faith man" is received back everlastingly into the company of God from which he originally fell.

It should be noted that Jesus in Matthew 16:18 assigns no primacy to Peter. According to Jesus, faithful service to God is the only criteria for primacy in the family of God.[28] The greatest soul in the kingdom is not so designated by a mere title. He is one in the kingdom who performs the greatest service at the greatest expense for his fellow man. Jesus constantly reminded the ambitious apostles of this right up to the crucifixion.[29] Our Lord emphasized that true greatness arose by extending mercy to others in need—not by expecting to be served by others. Regardless of our Lord's statement, the latter continues to be a problem within the church. The apostles achieved greatness by their humble services. Such humility was learned from Jesus when the Master insisted on washing their feet in the upper room, and then later by his death at the cross.

In the upper room Jesus girt about himself the towel of service. Here Jesus taught the disciples by personal example the prerequisite of lowly service for greatness in the New Kingdom. Only through humble faithful service, can one become a precious Jewel in the habitation of God. Some think Jesus assigned an elevated rank to Peter; rather, it was only calling him to lowly service.

Origen (185-225) believed the rock upon which the church was to be built was Peter, though not exclusively; Augustine (354-430) preferred to view the rock as Jesus. Chrysostom's position (347-407) seems nearer the whole truth. He believed the rock meant not Peter, the person; but the "confessions of Christ's deity." A host of post-reformation theologians agree with Chrysostom.[30]

(d) *The gates of hell.* There has been much difference of opinion concerning this part of our text "*The gates of hell shall not prevail against it.*" Some say this means that no successful opposition can be fought against the militant church by evil forces. These believe that Satan has no weapon that can prevent the victory of our Lord's army as it marches into all the world. Others hold that "gates of hell" mean the demonic forces which cannot cast Christians out of the church. While such explanations may seem somewhat plausible, the real force of the text is revealed by Matthew in 16:21: "*From that time Jesus began to show the disciples that he must go to Jerusalem and suffer many things from the elders and the chief priests and scribes, and be killed, and on the third day be raised*" (RSV). The hadean world opened its gates to swallow Jesus in perpetual death, but its gates could not keep him there. "*In him is life,*" John said, and that sinless life was stronger than death. The

gates could not hold him because they could not prevail against the power of a sinless life in God. Peter on Pentecost preached "*You crucified and killed Jesus by the hands of lawless men. But God raised him up, having loosed the pangs of death, because it was not possible for him to be held by it . . . he was not abandoned in Hades, nor did his flesh see corruption. This Jesus God raised.*"[31]

Matthew records that Jesus would die to redeem man, then later burst back through the gates of Hades in a resurrected body, perfecting the work he came to do. The gates of hell did not prevail, because they could not prevail, against the power of God. "*In him was life; and the life was the light of men.*"[32]

(e) *The keys of the kingdom.* The power to open the doors to the kingdom of God are always given to those who believe in Jesus' divine Sonship. The "keys" are no exclusive gift to Peter. The power to open the doors of God's building was granted to Peter because he possessed the quality of faith essential for citizenship in the kingdom. The church/ kingdom is the "pillar and ground" of the truth.

Peter confessed the truth that Jesus is the Son of God. Peter used the keys to open the gates of the kingdom of heaven when he preached the resurrection of Jesus, and that Jesus was Lord who would forgive the sins of those who would "*repent and be baptized . . . for the remission of sins . . . .*"[33] The doors of the kingdom of heaven are locked to all those who disbelieve the deity and lordship of Jesus. The power to enter the kingdom is made available through the preaching of the Gospel. The keys grant entrance to those who by faithful response put away sin and confess Jesus as God's Son (Ac. 2:38; Rom. 10:9-10).

He who preaches the gospel in any generation uses the same keys as the apostles used to unlock salvation to all believers.[34]

(f) *The binding and loosing.* After the crucifixion, the Gospels remained unwritten for many decades. The standard of truth during this period was oral, apostolic teaching.[35] "Binding and loosing" was the authority from heaven invested in the inspired word of God. This power was enforced via preaching the gospel. Like receiving the keys to the kingdom, such was not invested in a special office given to Peter; but to all the apostles, and all later believers who would unleash the power of the gospel through preaching. The "binding and loosing" effect always accompanies gospel preaching because it is this medium that wields the judgmental power of the Holy Spirit that separates the wheat (believers) from the chaff (unbelievers).[36] The apostles, along with all who have taught and baptized by the authority of Jesus under the great commission, have loosed believers from their sins.[37] These have obtained righteousness through faith in the cleansing effect of the blood of Jesus.[38]

A miraculous example of the negative binding effect of the power of the Holy Spirit is seen in Acts 5 where Peter announced the fate of Ananias and Sapphira. Their lying to God precipitated the death penalty which was carried out immediately by the Holy Spirit. Later, Paul used the same binding effect when he smote Elymas the sorcerer with blindness when he attempted to prevent Sergius Paulus from believing the truth.[39]

The authority to bind and loose was given to the apostles who used it in a miraculous manner. Short of the miraculous power, Jesus invests all teachers with this authority. These are those who rule under him by preaching the Gospel. These are the kings over the nations mentioned in Revelation 1:6. When the Gospel is taught and believed, the obedient have loosed to them the blessing of eternal life while the disobedient have bound upon them the punishment of eternal death.[40] Dependent upon the attitude of the hearer, there is power within truth to generate faith or to harden the heart.[41] We note further that the miraculous judgment of immediate death upon Ananias and Sapphira demonstrates that this power was limited to the apostles as there is no other instance like this in the New Testament.[42]

(g) *God's "faith person" is the "Israelite indeed."* The New Jerusalem is composed of the true spiritual children of Abraham such as Nathanael. Jesus said of him, "*Behold, an Israelite indeed, in whom there is no guile.*"[43] Israel did not receive the message of faith

when it was offered to them under the first covenant, therefore they were prevented from receiving the target of that covenant, Jesus Christ. Yet, a small remnant of "Israelites indeed," like Nathanael, received the message. This term was used by the apostle Paul to depict the faithful children of God regardless of their racial background.[44]

Summary: *The Eternal Dwelling Place.* The "Israelite indeed" is a precious stone of faith who will dwell eternally in the city of God. He is a "faith stone" laid into the walls of the eternal city. Paul calls such faith people "precious stones" in I Corinthians 3:12. See also I Peter 2:4ff.

Note the beautiful city of God with all the precious stones (the redeemed) composing its walls in Revelation 21:10ff. "*And he carried me away in the spirit to a great and high mountain, and showed me that great city, the holy Jerusalem, descending out of heaven from God, having the glory of God and her light was like unto a precious stone most precious, even like a jasper stone, clear crystal; and had a wall great and high, and had twelve gates, and at the gates twelve angels, and names written thereon, which are the names of the twelve tribes of the children of Israel on the east three gates; and on the north three gates; on the south three gates; and on the west three gates.*

And the wall of the city had twelve foundations, and in them the names of the twelve apostles of the Lamb. . .And the building of the wall of it was jasper and the city was pure gold, like unto clear glass. And the foundations of the wall of the city were garnished with all manner of precious stones . . . ."

C. The close of the first phase of Jesus' ministry

Jesus' public ministry divides itself easily into two major aspects of teaching. The first part of the curriculum has to do with leading the disciples to discover his true identity as the Messiah, the Son of God. The second aspect of his ministry was to correct an error in their thinking concerning the coming Messiah. This proved more difficult to accomplish than the first stage of discovering his true identity.

They must come to understand that the Messiah was to deliver Israel through suffering and death, and that he had not come to overthrow Israel's enemies and establish an earthly throne in Jerusalem.

The emphasis during the first phase of Jesus' curriculum was, *Who Am I?* It was successfully completed when Peter made the great confession of Jesus' deity. The emphasis of the second phase is, *The Messiah must suffer.* It begins in Matthew 16:21, only five verses after the disciples' amazing discovery that Jesus was the Christ. Matthew begins the second phase with these words "*From that time forth began Jesus to show unto his disciples, how that he must go unto Jerusalem, and suffer many things of the elders and chief priests and scribes, and be killed, and be raised the third day.*"

Even though Peter passed the final test of the first phase of Jesus' teaching program, he immediately failed in the application of that confession when Jesus announced the second phase.[45] Peter had utterly no comprehension of a *suffering, dying Messiah.* Although Peter had just confessed Jesus as *the Son of God,* he immediately sought to *correctly instruct Jesus* on his mission as the Messiah.

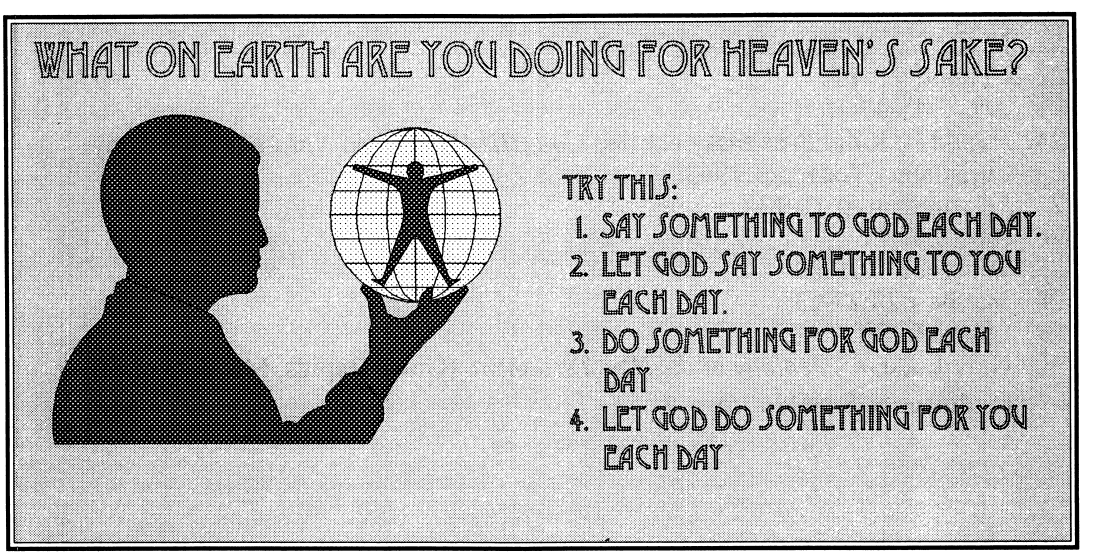
And the foundations of the wall of the city were garnished with all manner of precious stones. The first foundation was jasper; the second, sapphire; the third, a chalcedony; the fourth, an emerald; The fifth, sardonyx; the sixth, sardius; the seventh, chrysolite; the eighth, beryl; the ninth, a topaz; the tenth, a chrysoprasus; the eleventh, a jacinth; the twelfth, an amethyst. And the twelve gates were twelve pearls every several gate was of one pearl and the street of the city was pure gold, as it were transparent glass.
—Rev. 21:19-21

No doubt Peter proceeded to correct Jesus both out of love and horror without realizing how inconsistent he was with the confession he had just made. This is like many Christians who make the same joyful discovery. They are baptized into Christ, then immediately begin adjusting Jesus' word to their traditional views. This is every bit the same as Peter's sin.

In Matthew 16:22, Peter rebukes Jesus for believing he must suffer and die, saying "*This shall not happen unto thee.*" In the very next verse Jesus says Peter has offended him and calls him Satan. Spoken by a dear close friend, the thought of averting the cross must have stunned Jesus to the quick. He did not need any dissuasion toward his suffering. All should realize that Satan is at work within our dearest friends if they are trying to influence us against Jesus' plain teaching. Jesus did not cherish the upcoming cross, but knew from the beginning it was necessary to save Peter and the whole world. The suggestion that he need not suffer the cross when it was the only hope for the world was extremely offensive to our Lord. Jesus viewed this suggestion as identical to the one he faced in the wilderness when Satan proposed that he achieve glory without suffering. Had he gone the route Peter suggested, he would have completely failed in his redemptive mission for the world. On this point, Jesus felt for a moment that he once again was being confronted by Satan.[46] Perhaps this is one of the occasions referred to when the Scripture says after the wilderness temptation that Satan departed from Jesus "*for a little season.*"

Temptations can be awesomely alluring, but never more forceful than when your very best friend attempts to persuade you that you are suffering needlessly.

One cannot help but think of Job. Job knew he was a righteous man and that he was not suffering because of his sins. But in spite of his convictions, Job was accused of being unrighteous *by his friends.* They pointed to his suffering as a punishment from God for his sin. Regardless, Job proved faithful in spite of the loss of all things, even his own health. Finally, in what must have been an awful moment, even his wife suggested that he remove his misery by cursing God and dying. Job answered that she was a foolish woman. She did not seem to realize that both the sun and the rain come upon the just and the unjust. Satan had accused Job of being "a saint for good times." He had told God that if he would allow Job to suffer, the old patriarch would finally curse God to his face. Job proved the devil to be a liar. When a similar situation confronted Jesus, it is no wonder he said to Peter, "*Get thee behind me, Satan.*"



References

1. Marcus L. Loane quoting F. J. Hort in an essay entitled *Christ and the Church,* published by Christianity Today, ca.1963.
2. Ephesians 2:19
3. Revelation 21:14ff.
4. Leviticus 26:15-16
5. Hebrews 3:2-6; I Peter 2:17
6. Acts 4:8-12
7. John 1:11; 2:19-21
8. Revelation 22
9. Marcus L. Loane, p. 35 *Op. cit.,* see reference 1 above.
10. Adam Clarke, *Clarke's Commentary* (Nashville, Abingdon-Cokesbury, new ed.), Vol. 5, See notes on Matthew 14:33, p. 160 and Matthew 16:18, p. 170
11. *Ibid.*
12. Matthew 8:14-16
13. I Corinthians 2:14ff.
14. W. E. Vine, *Expository Dictionary of New Testament Words* (Westwood, N. J., Fleming H. Revel Co., 1964), p. 302.
15. I Peter 2:5ff.
16. Henry Thiessen, *Introduction to the New Testament* (Grand Rapids, Mich., Wm. B. Eerdmans & Sons, 1968), p. 135
17. Acts 8:36-37; Romans 10:9-10
18. Matthew 7:24
19. Ephesians 2:20-21
20. Romans 2:17
21. I Peter 2:5; Romans 10:9-10
22. I Timothy 3:15
23. Acts 2:41-47
24. Harold B. Kuhn in as essay entitled *God, His Names and Nature* published by Christianity Today, ca.1963.
25. I Corinthians 3:10-17
26. Acts 2:47
27. Ephesians 2:19-20
28. Matthew 20:22-23
29. Luke 22:25ff.
30. G. E. Ladd, *A Theology of the New Testament,* (Grand Rapids, Mich., Wm. B. Eerdmans & Sons, 1975), p. 7.

31. Acts 2:23ff.
32. John 1:4
33. Acts 2:38
34. Matthew 28:19-20
35. Acts 2:42
36. Matthew 3:12; John 20:22
37. Romans 1:16
38. Ephesians 1:7; Revelation 1:6
39. Acts 13:7-11
40. Matthew 24:45-46
41. II Thess. 2:10-11, Heb. 10:26ff.
42. Acts 5
43. John 1:47
44. Galatians 3:27ff.
45. Matthew 16:27
46. II Corinthians 11:14

Supplementary Readings

1. Culver, Robert D. *The Life of Christ.* Grand Rapids, Baker, 1976
2. Edersheim, Alfred. *The Life and Times of Jesus the Messiah.* Grand Rapids Eerdmans, 1972
3. Morgan, G. Campbell. *The Parables and Metaphors of Our Lord.* Old Tappan N. J.: Revell, 1956
4. Stalker, James M. The Life of Jesus Christ. Old Tappan, N. J. Revell, 1891

Questions for Chapter Twelve

1. What are two phases of Jesus instructions? Where does each begin and end?
2. What was the "rock" upon which Jesus promised to build his church?
3. Describe the building of God's new spiritual temple. Trace it from Old Testament prophecies through the Book of Revelation.

Building On Christ, the Solid Rock

1. *Christ is the foundation stone (Acts 4:11-12)*
2. *He built the church on the rock of his name (Matt. 16:18)*
3. *All must confess his name or be denied before the Father (Matt. 10:32)*
4. *His name must be confessed by the mouth (Rom. 10:9-10)*
5. *Confession of his name validates one's baptism into Christ (Acts 8:36-37)*
6. *A Christian is known by a daily life of confessing this name (I Jno. 4:2-3; 4:15; II Jno. 1:7; Rev. 3:5)*

Outline for Chapter Thirteen

The Second Phase of Christ's Ministry: The Suffering Servant

I. Correcting False Conceptions Concerning the Messiah
   A. Peter: an example of Jewish messianic misunderstanding
   B. The beginning of the second phase of Jesus' ministry.
      1. Lessons on the Mount of Transfiguration
         (a) It revealed added information about Jesus' death
         (b) It demonstrated the superiority of Jesus over the law and the prophets
      2. Summary

II. The Relevance of Worship to Life
   A. The essential "mustard seed" faith
   B. Implications of the mustard seed faith
      1. Life is more important than size
      2. Faith alone is ineffectual—dead
      3. What is "mustard seed" faith?
      4. Recipe for mustard seed faith
   C. Are Christians to fast today?
   D. Jesus and the Temple tax
      1. The gold coin in the fish's mouth

HE MESSIAH MUST DIE!

Chapter Thirteen

The Second Phase of Christ's Ministry: The Suffering Servant

Matthew 16:11-17; Mark 9:23; Luke 9:28ff.

Why did my Saviour come to earth,
And to the humble go?
Why did he choose a lowly birth?
Because he loved me so!
He loved me so, he loved me so;
He gave his precious blood for me,
Because he loved me so.
—J. G. Dailey

1. CORRECTING FALSE CONCEPTIONS CONCERNING THE MESSIAH

The first great phase of Jesus' instruction to the disciples, which we have just completed, was for the purpose of leading them into the discovery of his true identity as the Son of God. This first part of his ministry consisted of instruction accompanied with revelatory signs which confirmed his message as God's word. This division involves the time from the disciple's call through Matthew 16:20. The first instructional period ended near the city of Caesarea Philippi. Here, Jesus gave the disciples something like a "midterm exam," asking them a direct question concerning his identity. This was a measurement of their faith concerning the authority of his teaching. Quite obviously, as seen in the great confession (Matt. 16:18), they passed the test.

Thus, in a limited way, they had successfully reached an essential plateau for advanced instruction. They were still novices and their faith was far from what it would be after the resurrection, but they were growing. Now, after their confession at Caesarea Philippi, they are to be introduced to the second and final part of their curriculum—*the Messiah must suffer.*

This is the more difficult part for them. Even though they now believe Jesus is the promised Messiah, they still hold traditional false conceptions concerning his earthly mission. These had to be removed. The Jewish messianic conception held that a messiah would appear who would deliver Israel from all national oppressors and reestablish David's throne in Jerusalem. Like David, he would be triumphant over his enemies and establish his earthly rule for-

ever. They were like the nuclear scientists before the explosion in the desert of New Mexico in 1945. They knew they were about to unleash a power never before seen by man, but they had no idea of the extent of their discovery. These good Jews never once doubted that the new David would slay again the modern Goliath by the sword. It had never dawned on them that the Messiah would die at the hands of his enemies—the worst of which was his own people led by the high priest. This was incredibly alien to traditional Jewish messianic thought.

A. Peter: an example of Jewish messianic misunderstanding

Peter was expressing this traditional Jewish view when he rebuked Jesus for announcing that, as the Messiah, he must suffer and die.[1] Peter had come to believe that Jesus was the Messiah, therefore it was impossible for him to be defeated in death. Peter must have thought that Jesus had not learned a thing in synagogue. He definitely needed proper instruction. The Messiah could not suffer and die; he would lead Israel to victory. Jerusalem would be the location of his new throne from which he would rule over all Israel's enemies. This was staple Jewish doctrine and Peter had learned it well.

Peter's attitude is reflective of so many today who read the Gospel, declare they believe it, but do not hesitate to adapt it to their traditional religious concepts. Peter's actions show that he did not understand much about the Messiah's true mission at all. He thought he did, and true to human nature that has persisted for centuries, Peter *presumed to instruct* the *one whom he had just confessed to be the Son of God.*

This presumption indicates Peter's faith at this point is far short of believing Jesus to be the omniscient and omnipotent power of the Almighty God. If Peter had really understood that he was talking to the God who created all things, *would he have presumed to instruct him?* His confession at Caesarea Philippi is certainly commendable, it is somewhat like that of the new born Christian's confession. He has a tremendous amount remaining to be learned.

The remaining months of Jesus' ministry were spent in correcting the false theories the disciples held about the Messiah. Unlike the first phase of his ministry, he did not accomplish this second goal during his earthly life. It was not until after he had risen from the dead that the disciples came into a full understanding of the need for a suffering Messiah.

B. The beginning of the second phase of Jesus' ministry

Immediately after the events in Matthew 16:21, Jesus began the new *second phase* of his training program for the disciples. This began when he took Peter, James and John into a high mountain for a dramatic teaching experience. They never forgot it. Many years after Jesus' death Peter recalls this experience, calling this place the holy mount.[2] Today it is commonly referred to as the Mount of Transfiguration.

1. Lessons on the Mount of Transfiguration (Matt. 17).

The event that happened on the holy mount was of supreme importance in at least two ways:

(a) *It revealed to them additional information about the suffering Messiah and that his kingdom transcended death.* This was the main feature of the conversation.

(b) *It demonstrated the superiority of Jesus' word over Moses' law and the prophets.* Peter was extremely elated over the experience. He proposed they should build three tabernacles, one to Moses, one to Elias and one to Jesus. At this moment they heard a voice from heaven endorsing Jesus as God's Son and admonishing them to hear him.

The tabernacle, Temple, and synagogue had been centers of instruction for Moses and the prophets, but the law and prophets had served their purpose. Both Moses and the prophets had pointed to the coming of the Messiah. All the old scriptures from the protevangelion of Genesis 3:15, to the preaching of John had been fulfilled in Jesus. Thus, we have God saying from heaven that Moses' law was not the ultimate source for believers; neither did it lie in the old school of prophets as represented by the presence of Elias. It now dwelt wholly in Jesus. The writer of Hebrews summarized it this way: "*God, who at sundry times and in divers manners, spake in times past unto the Fathers by the prophets, hath in these last days spoken unto us by his Son, whom he hath appointed heir of all things, by whom also he made the worlds.*"[3]

Concerning the manner in which this event demonstrates the superiority of Jesus' word over the Law, G. Campbell Morgan writes:

> *Moses stood upon that mount of glory as the representative of the law. Elijah represented prophecy. Moses' presence signified that in Jesus the shadows of the law were fulfilled and now withdrawn. In Jerusalem, men were still fighting, not merely for the law of Moses, but for the traditions of the elders, and priests and leaders were still arguing about the tithe of mint and cumin, while here upon the mount was the great lawgiver, himself, by his presence acknowledging that the glorified One, Who would presently be crucified in the name of the law did in Himself gather up all that was hinted at, suggested, included in the economy of the past . . . So also was Elijah. He had spoken the word of God. From place to place he had journeyed, speaking to kings in their corruption, to courts in their degradation, and to individuals in their need, that one unceasing word, Thus saith Jehovah.*
>
> *Every word that had passed the lips of Elijah in the olden days had been but the spelling out in simple syllable and speech, of that which embodied in the Person of Christ; and he stood now upon the mount of knowledge, that in this transfigured One, all the speech of heaven begins and ends; that in Him every prophecy of the past is fulfilled, and that the prophet of the days to come, will gather from this Man and His teaching, his inspiration and his power.*[4]

These two men represented the complete Old Testament system better than any of the others. They stood for both the Law and the Prophets. This is the way the scriptures were alluded to in the New Testament.[5] The heavenly voice confirmed for the disciples that the old system was no longer to be considered as final authority once they came into the kingdom of heaven. They were to hear Jesus in all things.[6]

Luke preserves for all generations the topic of their conversation. He records: "*They spake of his decease which should be accomplished at Jerusalem.*" Jesus needed encouragement for the future. The pain and suffering of the crucifixion would be extremely intense. The Greek word from which the King James Version translates decease is "exodus." Perhaps it would have been better for the translators to have left this word as it was as it seems to convey much more than merely his decease.

Concerning Jesus' departure, there was involved the nature of his death, burial, and resurrection. Moses and Elias were highly

The heavens declare the glory of God; and the firmament showeth his handiwork. —Psa. 19:1

qualified to converse with Jesus on the matter of suffering. Moses had faced the ordeal of the wilderness wandering and the problem of leading a rebellious people to the land of promise. Elias, known also as Elijah the Tishbite, was a great prophet of the 9th century B.C. He also had suffered much, *but had precipitated the fall of the house of idolatrous Ahab.* His life on earth was terminated by his ascension to heaven in a whirlwind.[7]

What better person than Moses could have talked about an exodus for God's people? Moses led Israel in an exodus out of Egyptian bondage to form them into a free nation under God. Spiritually, Jesus was about to do a similar thing by leading Satan's captives out from under his rule into the kingdom of haeaven. He would accomplish this by his passion and resurrection. Moses stood on the brink of disaster at the western edge of the Red Sea with nothing but sheer faith in God to carry him through the waters. Moses could have said to Jesus in this conversation about the exodus: "I recall the moment when I stood with the Red Sea before me, and with Pharaoh's armies and I cried out for the people to stand still and see the salvation of the Lord. But, the Lord said to me, Wherefore criest thou unto me? Speak to the children of Israel that they may go forward."[8]

He could well have encouraged Jesus to go forward into the deep waters of his passion—to go through them, and find his sheep. Moses might have said in return: "I am here to assure you that the victory of God over all his enemies in all past ages was for the glory of this very moment—*the arrival of the eternal kingdom of God.* This can only come through your baptism of suffering at Jerusalem. You now must go through the cold waters. All history has waited for this final victory. This moment marks the close of your ministry on earth. Upon the accomplishment of this deed hangs all of Jehovah's promises in the Law and Prophets. God will not fail to accomplish in your exodus what he has repeatedly confirmed to the fathers since Adam. It is up to you to finish the work that all faithful children dreamed to see throughout history."

2. In summary

If the mountain top experience was designed to strengthen and encourage Jesus, it was also to instruct the disciples concerning the true *suffering nature of the Messiah.* Its initial thrust is observed in Jesus' announcement of his passion in Jerusalem which is followed by Peter's negative reaction to what he said (Matt. 16:21). Peter's well meaning, but ignorant, advice was considered straight from Satan. Jesus rebuked him sharply. It had been prophesied that the coming Messiah would suffer (Isaiah 53). Finally, the transfiguration not only underscored the suffering aspect of the Messiah, but it assured his absolute victory.

II. THE RELEVANCE OF WORSHIP TO LIFE

Many Christians have known the wonder of being with Jesus on the mountain tops of spiritual joy. There is the good gospel meeting which greatly edifies us by its uplifting singing and our feasting upon the bread of life. Then there are those moments spent in spiritual meditation, when, by thorough study of his word, Christians suddenly grasp a deeper spiritual insight into God's word. There are also those moments of comfort and awakening to God's glory when we walk down nature trails in the great outdoors, or gaze agape at the expanses of heaven on a clear night. Still, there are those precious times of fellowship when disciples mingle with the saints at the Lord's Supper table deeply appreciative of his wonderful grace. Surely we can understand Peter's spiritual rapture, and realize why he exclaimed to Jesus, "*Lord, it is good for us to be here.*" Some saints in all ages would like to build tabernacles as Peter wanted to—in the midst of perpetual divine communion and communication.

But we live in a very practical world, and

while we cherish the idea of constantly dwelling in rapture with Jesus, we cannot forget the persisting needs about us in the world. Practical Christianity has to deal with the hurts of its fellows that cry out for assistance. These needs are disquieting, bothersome, and as frustrating to us as they were to those disciples at the foot of the Mount of Transfiguration.

The disciples had a wonderful and edifying experience atop the mount with Jesus, but the time came when they had to descend the mount into the world to make practical use of that experience. And so must we learn the relevance of worship to life. The ancient preacher said: "*there is a time for all things.*" There is a time to worship and there is a time to serve. The call is issued from the pulpit to be workers for the Lord. It helps qualify us by proper instruction and urges us on, saying, "Hurry, time is precious and we must build the local church for Jesus." This is a constant and badly needed theme. But churches tend to burn themselves out, spending all their energies on external programs without adequate time for essential inflow. One lady complained, *"Our preacher keeps us so busy doing church work, we don't have any time left to live the Christian life."* While spoken in humor, there is something deeper here. The more energy that is consumed in a race, the greater the demand for frequent refueling which is vital to winning the prize.

A pit stop is required to assure sufficient intake, for the race is not guaranteed to the swift, nor assured by the beauty of the car. Its reward rests upon one's ability to endure to the end. There must be inflow as well as outgo to win. The mountain top encounters with God are spiritual maintenance periods to keep the Christian adequately equipped for the race. The race for life cannot succeed without these spiritual replenishments for a famished soul. However, inflow is not enough. The sole purpose of the pit stop is to provide an infusion of energy for those hard grinding miles ahead. The disciples learned this from their mountain top experience, a grand experience indeed, but upon descending into the valley, they found their neighbors' sufferings had not ceased. Mountains coexist with valleys. The disciples' spiritual edification with Jesus on top of the mountain was contemporary with others in the valley of need.[9] We all must be aware of this.

As the disciples descended from the mountain top, they abruptly came face to face with pain. Upon their descent, they met a father whose son was critically ill with epilepsy.[10] None of the disciples who remained below could heal the young man. Healing comes from the heights, but it can only come through a willingness to descend from those heights with empathy for the hurting world.

The church's mission is to be the pillar and ground of truth.[11] For a congregation to remain comfortable within its sanctuary, while ignoring the crying pains of the outside world, is to deny Jesus much like Peter did when he cried, "*I do not know the man.*"[12] To remain aloof and detached from human pain is to be every bit as guilty of the same sin as the Gadarenes who preferred their swine economy over the blessings of Jesus for their hurting citizenry.[13] To hear and respond to the cries of the lost and suffering is the express meaning of Jesus' word in his great sermon on the mount where he said: "*Ye are the light of the world,*" and, "*ye are the salt of the earth.*" It is inconsistent to light a lamp and then promptly defeat its mission by placing it under a cover. Also, neither salt nor a Christian are profitable if they have lost their influence.

Worship is wonderful and deeply satisfying. While it can fill a great vacuum in the soul, it becomes only vanity when it remains void of any sensitiveness to serving God out in the world. To a great degree, the energy to accomplish this is received in the worship service of the church. However, if church worship becomes only an isolated experience that insulates its membership against the hurts of the world, and anesthetizes them to the plight of a hurting brother, such is not New Testament doctrine. The lesson every disciple must learn from the upper room narrative in John 13 is, "*If I then, your Lord and Master, have washed your feet; ye also ought to wash one another's feet.*"

His voice, clear as a trumpet, states: "*In as much as ye did it unto the least of these my*

brethren, ye did it unto me. For I was hungry and ye fed me, naked and ye clothed me, and in prison and ye visited me."[14] The place to serve in the world is in the valley. Relief for the world's pain is not performed by erecting tabernacles atop lofty peaks dedicated to the heroes of faith however great they may be. Healing hurt follows when we couple our worship services with the washing of the needy's feet. The question of true human greatness was supposed to have been settled in the upper room. To be Christian is to be utterly available for the compassionate needs of others. Perhaps it is here, as much as anywhere else, that we fall short of glorifying God. A splendid example of our point is contained in Acts 10. On the roof of his house Peter was revelling in a rapturous vision in which he conversed with God. At the same moment from below there was a rapping at the gate by people in need of salvation. Worship is indeed wonderful, but the hurt of others must never be forgotten while we are before God; but neither must we ever become so busy with the pain of the world that we forget to fall before God in worship. Christ said, "*What God hath joined together, let not man put asunder.*" James adds: "*Show me thy faith without thy works, and I will show thee my faith by my works.*"[15] Worship and service are divinely joined together and must never be separated.

A. The essential "mustard seed" faith

This small but quality faith qualifies one for effective service. The disciples were unable to heal the sick man in Matthew 17 while Jesus was away. They asked the Lord, "Why?" Jesus replied, "*If ye have faith as a grain of mustard seed, ye shall say unto this mountain, Remove hence to yonder place; and it shall remove; and nothing shall be impossible unto you.*"[16] The mustard seed was a tiny seed. To have "mustard seed faith" did not mean that Jesus was glorifying those with only a small amount of faith; he was saying that *the quality of faith,* ever so small, was its secret for effectual power. One with only a tiny amount of genuine faith, Jesus was saying, would empower one to accomplish the seemingly impossible. Note what is implied in "mustard seed" faith.

1. Life is more important than size.

Jesus is reminding us that being alive is more important than being big. It has been said, "better to be a live flea than a dead elephant." Jesus is emphasizing this thought to prepare them for service in the kingdom.

2. Faith alone is ineffectual, powerless—dead.

James speaks clearly on this: "*Thou believest there is one God; thou doest well: the devils also believe and tremble. But wilt thou know, O vain man, that faith without works is dead? . . . Ye see then how that by works a man is justified, and not by faith only . . . For as the body without the spirit is dead, so faith without works is dead also.*"[17] God has placed an invisible exploding power of life within the tiniest seed. Faith that is alive, however small, has God's power of life in it, enabling it to explode into action. The church at Sardis (Rev. 3) had a commendable reputation, but Jesus said it was dead. "*Thou hast a name that thou livest, and art dead.*"[18] Sardis could only boast of the mountains she once had moved, the hurdles she had scaled in the past. It would have been better for her to have had a living faith, however small, than to exist as a large beautiful corpse boasting an epitaph of past mountain top experiences.

3. What is "mustard seed" faith?

Jesus' word is the seed of the kingdom (Lu. 8:11). Mustard Seed Faith is the tiniest most basic faith hidden away in a heart that has been begotten by the word.[19] Mustard seed faith is the faith that transcends death and gives hope to the dying. *The indestructible*

word of God alive within a man's heart cannot be destroyed simply because that man dies. John has a wonderful discourse on this subject in his prologue.[20]

Abraham had Mustard Seed Faith. He believed God would keep his promise to bless all nations through his seed, even if Isaac, his son of promise, died without children. His faith was so strong he did not stagger in doubt when God commanded him to sacrifice Isaac. He offered his son because he believed God would resurrect him to keep his word. That is why Jesus said: "*Abraham rejoiced to see my day and was glad.*"[21] The tiniest faith that trusts God to fulfill his word in spite of death is Mustard Seed Faith. Having Mustard Seed Faith means that one believes that the word of Jesus is unlimited by death; it is to believe that God is able, and will keep his promises in Jesus, in spite of his death, by the power of his resurrection. How did Abraham rejoice by seeing Jesus' day? He believed God could and would keep his word in spite of Isaac's death. He believed in the divine power of God's indestructible word to resurrect life. Abraham freely offered Isaac, the child of promise, because he believed God would raise him from the dead.

This type of belief is the core of the essential mustard seed faith. The minimum faith for entering the kingdom is a faith that believes Jesus lives on after his death and that he will keep his word to come again in spite of it: "*Upon this rock, I will build my church; and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it.*"[22] There is no empowering belief short of *resurrection faith.* Faith without works is dead. A living obedient faith justified Abraham (Gen. 15:6).

4. Recipe for this vital faith.

After rebuking his disciples for their insufficient faith, Jesus added, "*Howbeit this kind goeth not out but by prayer and fasting?*" While the ASV omits this verse entirely, there is a great practical truth in it. The most powerful service for good in the kingdom of heaven is attained when a disciple invigorates and nourishes his faith by a prayerful and fasting spirit. When a call is issued for church members in a local church to help in various needs, too frequently only a few volunteer. Pleading announcements are made, but enrollment sheets asking for volunteers for a service like ministering to the sick, or providing transportation to church services remain mostly blank. Why? Many good works are undertaken without due prayer and preparation being made by the congregation. Such good programs often limp along and are short lived.

Zechariah gave the recipe for mustard seed faith when he said: "*Not by might, not by power, but by my spirit, saith the Lord of hosts.*"[23] The disciples waited in prayer and devotion for ten days before the Spirit came on Pentecost.[24] This was an essential part of their preparation prior to the birth of the church. Great decisions and important issues called for prayer and fasting. If Christians keep a keen awareness for the need of God's help in their work projects, and sufficiently prepare themselves for it spiritually, much burn-out could be eliminated in local evangelistic programs. Remember, "*faith comes by hearing and hearing by the word of God.*"[25] If a person is to acquire saving faith, it begins with private and/or collective Bible study. There is no such thing as New Testament faith without proper knowledge of the New Testament. *There can be no entrance into the kingdom of heaven without knowledge of how that entrance takes place,* else one could be unaware of his Christian citizenship. According to the prophet, this is impossible (Jer. 31:34). *Mustard Seed Faith, the tiniest living faith, dwells in the soul of one who believes that God's promises will hold true in spite of death.* One must nurture this faith to keep it alive and growing (II Pet. 3:18).

C. Should Christians fast today?

Is fasting a specifically bound religious sacrifice or is it an act of individual service? While many today feast and pay more than they fast and pray, some do fast to themselves on special occasions, but it is a private matter.

Remember, *Jesus rejected fasting for public display.*[26] He despised all pretentious acts of religion. He said that his disciples were not to fast for display. Fasting under the Christian system is not a mere rejection of certain foods on regular designated days, it occurs when the soul is afflicted before God.

Many may forego eating while experiencing a crisis in life. Perhaps this is practiced in secret much more than may be realized. While there is no command for Christians to fast at any specific time or for any particular reason, a spontaneous and private spiritual fast promotes intimate communion with God.

As much as the disciples enjoyed the holy mountain top experience, it had little impact on reaching a fuller realization of Jesus' mission at the moment because, after all this was over, they still were sorrowful when Jesus repeated his upcoming death in Jerusalem.[27] Right up to the close of Jesus' ministry the apostles continued to debate which of themselves would receive the greatest positions of honor in the kingdom.[28] Jesus' death had to occur and they had to receive the Holy Spirit on Pentecost before they properly understood much of his pre-cross teaching.

D. Jesus and the Temple tax (Matt. 17:24-27)

The Temple expenses were enormous. Taking their authority from Exodus 30:13, every male Jew over twenty years of age had to pay an annual Temple tax of a half-shekel, about two days wages. Those who collected the annual Temple tax asked Peter if Jesus paid his share. Not wanting to put Jesus in bad favor with the Temple officials, Peter quickly replied that Jesus did this. Peter's Jewish background caused him to believe that this tax was a worthy responsibility of all devout Jews. He assumed that Jesus would surely comply with the religious levy. Here again, it seems obvious that Peter did not fully understand the implications of confessing Jesus' divine Sonship. Had he understood the full import of his earlier confession in Caesarea Philippi, he would have understood Jesus' exemption from the Temple tax. For Jesus to pay it would mean the tax was levied upon the King's own family. Even earthly kings did not impose taxes upon their own children. Jesus, understanding his relationship with God, called the Temple "*My Father's house.*"[29] His family relationship relieved him of any responsibility in this matter. After reading Peter's mind as they entered a house, Jesus questioned him about the matter. He asked Peter if kings collected taxes from their own children or from strangers. Peter answered correctly that they only taxed strangers. To this, Jesus replied: "*The children are then free.*" The message is clear. If Peter was correct in his confession of Jesus' deity, then certainly God would not require tax from his own Son. The Temple belonged to God, therefore, as God's Son, Jesus was exempt because of his family relationship. However, Jesus did not desire to cause unnecessary problems over such things. The Jews did not believe in him, so this would only incite them to arrest him too soon to adequately train the apostles.

In spite of his avowed immunity from the tax, Jesus proceeded to pay it. We are reminded of Paul's statement in I Corinthians 9:19: "*For though I be free from all men, yet have I made myself servant unto all, that I might gain the more.*" He also said, "*All things are lawful unto me, but all things are not expedient.*"[30] Paul received this beautiful attitude from Christ. Jesus refused to claim personal rights where it might cause others to stumble. The Jews sought to entrap him with the Temple tax as well as other entanglements; but Jesus lived by a higher code than personal rights. Lest someone be offended through ignorance, Jesus proposed to pay the Temple tax.

Jesus proposed a strange way of paying the Temple debt for himself and Peter. The plan called for a miracle to be performed by him, along with Peter's obedience to Christ's word. ". . . *Go thou to the sea,*" Jesus said, "*and cast an hook, and take up the fish that first cometh up; and when thou hast opened his mouth, thou shalt find a piece of money; that take, and give unto them for me and thee*"

(Matt. 17:27).

Jesus knew that the ordinary person could not pay his debt to God this way, or did he? What man can go down to the sea and catch a fish with a gold coin in its mouth to pay his religious dues to God? Some have rationalized that this meant Peter should go fishing and pay the tribute money by selling his catch. This would wrest the text and completely miss the great lesson. *Jesus would never have performed a miracle to satisfy his personal needs.* This was forever settled in the wilderness temptation. What, then, is the lesson?

Jesus' performance of the miracle, along with Peter's obedient response, paid the debt. Observe in this, God working along with man to pay man's debt to God. It is a splendid text which provides a touchstone for Paul's later statement: "*we are co-laborers with God.*" By grace, Jesus pays man's debt of sin, but it must be coupled with one's response of faith and obedience just as it was coupled with Peter's obedient faith. When Jesus told Peter that upon casting a hook into the sea he would catch a fish with a gold coin in its mouth, Peter immediately responded with unquestioning faith. This is the manner in which all men's spiritual debts are paid. Paul stated it this way: "*By grace are ye saved through faith.*"[31] By grace, God has payed the debt for all men's sins in the gift of his Son. Coupled with that great gift must be man's obedient faith to claim the payment for himself. "*For God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life.*"[32] By going fishing and not questioning the incredible odds of catching a fish with a gold coin in its mouth, Peter faithfully accepted Jesus' offer to pay his Temple tax. In principle, one does similarly today when he obeys Christ's word to become his disciple.

Jesus paid our debt of sin by grace, but the means of that grace is made effectual only by accepting the commands of the Great Commission in Matthew 28:18ff. The lesson is: *God and man embrace to accomplish reconciliation in Jesus, just as the father and the prodigal son embraced at the son's return home.*[33] Jesus paid the debt to set us free, but we must acknowledge his gift by obedience (See Acts 2:37-38).

Jesus paid it all,
All to him I owe;
Sin has left a crimson stain,
He washed it white as snow.
—Mrs. H. M. Hall

References

1. Matthew 16:21
2. II Peter 1:18
3. Hebrews 1:1-2
4. G. Campbell Morgan, *The Crisis Of The Christ* (Old Tappan Road, New Jersey, Fleming H. Revell Co.: 1936), pp. 238-239
5. Matthew 22:40; Luke 16:16
6. Matthew 17:21; Hebrews 1:1-2
7. II Kings 2:1ff.
8 Exodus 14:15
9. Matthew 17

10. The King James Version has "lunatic." The Revised Version has "epilepsy."
11. I Timothy 3:15
12. Matthew 26:72
13. Matthew 8
14. Matthew 25:45
15. James 2:18
16. Matthew 17:20
17. James 2:18-20
18. Revelation 3:1
19. Luke 8:11; I Peter 1:23
20. John 1:14
21. John 8:56
22. Matthew 16:18
23. Zechariah 4:6
24. Acts 1:1-8
25. Romans 10:17
26. Matthew 6:17-18
27. Matthew 17:22-23
28. Matthew 20:20ff.
29. John 2:16
30. I Corinthians 6:12
31. Ephesians 2:8-9
32. John 3:16
33. Luke 15:11

Supplementary Readings:

Choate, Betty Burton. *Jesus Christ The Eternal Sacrifice.* Winona, Miss., J. C. Choate Publications
Dillstone, F. W. *Jesus Christ and His Cross.* Nashville, Tenn., Abingdon Press, 1966
Exum, Jack. *Leaving Self Behind.* Franklin Springs, Ga., Advocate Press, 1979
Thomas, W. C. *The Circle and the Cross.* Nashville, Tenn., Abingdon Press, 1964

Questions for Chapter Thirteen

1. What was the traditional Jewish concept concerning the coming Messiah?
2. How did Peter exemplify this traditional philosophy?
3. Why did Jesus rebuke Peter so severely, even worse than when he denied him at his arrest?
4. What was the theme of the second phase of Jesus' instruction?
5. Name two important lessons to be gleaned from the transfiguration experience.
6. Summarize the mountain top experience and give its lessons.
7. How is worship relevant to life?
8. What is essential "mustard seed" faith?
9. What are some of the implications of having "mustard seed" faith?
10. Examine the scriptures given in the text and explain how obedience to them and others demonstrate saving faith.
11. Should Christians fast or not fast today? Support your answer.
12. What may be seen regarding the redemptive plan of salvation in the narrative about Jesus paying the Temple tax with the coin in the fish's mouth?

—Read This—

And when thou prayest, thou shalt not be as the hypocrites are: for they love to pray standing in the synagogues and in the corners of the streets, that they may be seen of men. Verily I say unto you, They have their reward . . .

After this manner therefore pray ye: Our Father which art in heaven, Hallowed be thy name. Thy kingdom come. Thy will be done in earth, as it is in heaven. Give us this day our daily bread. And forgive us our debts, as we forgive our debtors. And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil: For thine is the kingdom, and the power, and the glory, for ever. Amen.

—Matthew 6:6, 9-13

Outline for Chapter Fourteen

Jesus and Forgiveness

I. All Are Sinners by Choice
   A. To sin against man is to sin against God
      1. Good for evil: The Christian's weapon against hostility
      2. Violence breeds violence
      3. Forgiveness is not always easy
      4. How often should one forgive?
      5. What God's forgiveness is like
      6. The parable of the unforgiving servant
      7. Ingratitude and unforgiveness—their fearful attributes
      8. The principle of forgiveness demonstrated in prayer

Chapter Fourteen

Jesus and Forgiveness

Matthew 18:15-35

Forgive me Lord, I cried in shame,
Forgive me Lord, Of all my blame;
Oft I have come to thee before,
But greater grief I never bore.
Remove my sins of crimson stain,
That I may view my face again.

"My child," my Lord replied to me,
"They can be gone, that none can see;
As oceans' tides have washed the sands,
Of kings footprints of ancient lands;
But remember this, to be forgiven,
Forgive thy brother, seventy times seven."
—Fenter D. Northern

1. ALL ARE SINNERS BY CHOICE

Paul said the Gentiles had defiled their consciences by breaking the natural law, while the Jew had defiled themselves by breaking the covenant God had given them. Therefore, he concludes, "*all have sinned and come short of the glory of God.*"[1] Consequently, every responsible soul on earth needs forgiveness. Jesus came into the world to save man from himself.[2] God cannot have fellowship with men laden with the guilt of sin. This would be contrary to his impeccable Spirit.

Each person, since Adam, has been responsible for his personal sins.[3] God has given man a free will whereby he can reject the will of the Almighty God. What awesome responsibility has been placed in man's hands—to be able to say *no* to his Creator! God will not arbitrarily make men godly. God has chosen to separate salvageable human spirits from the non-salvageable through his immeasurable love and grace in Jesus. Those who appreciate God's free gift are drawn to him and accept his gift of eternal life. Many are offended by God's gospel and choose to spurn his grace, and the war goes on. Each person must make his own evaluation and choose righteousness or evil from within his heart. By this moral self determination, man chooses his own destiny. Spiritual blessings just do not happen, we make them happen by choosing the social paths we

most desire to follow. Of the disciple who betrayed Jesus, it is said: "*Judas, by transgression fell, that he might go to his own place.*"[4] It was Judas' place because he chose it of his own free will.

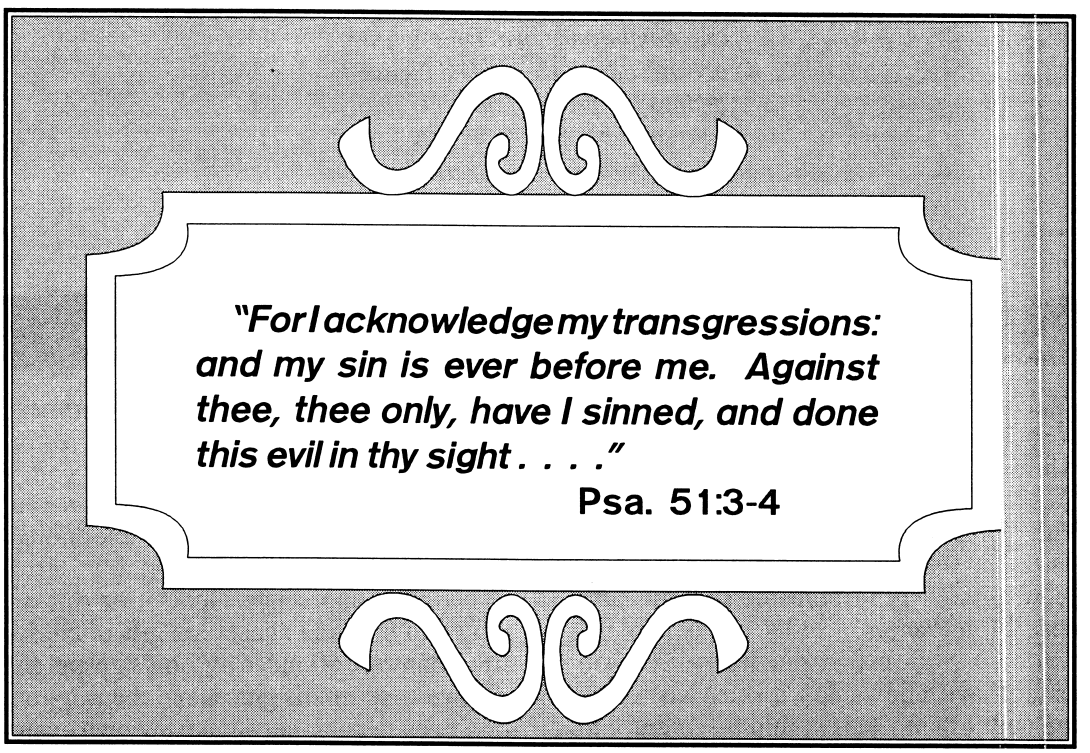
The same is true for each of us. Part of the maturing process is learning to accept responsibility for our own actions.

A. To sin against man is to sin against God

Sin violates both vertical and horizontal relationships. David sinned against Uriah when he committed adultery with his wife, Bathsheba. He sinned further against his own army when he assigned them a foolish battle just to slay Uriah. Yet, in depth of remorse, David penitently confessed his sin against God.[5]

Matthew states that sin against humanity is also sin against Jesus, and that service to humanity is also service to the Lord.[6] All sin is against God even though it involves our fellow man. The Bible reveals that one seeking a loving relationship with God must also seek the same type of relationship with his brother.[7] Consequently, if one petitions God for grace, he must be willing to extend grace to those who ask it of himself. In short, no man must ask anything of God unless he is willing to do the same thing for his neighbor.

Envy and jealousy destroy man's tenderness toward his brother.[8] Salvation from sin not only redeems man from under the curse of the law, it also demands a house cleaning of his soul. To forgive is to be willing to pardon. To pardon is to cast off, throw



away, or to erase from the face of the mind even as a child erases from the chalkboard an error he has made.

Many claim they have forgiven others, but in reality still cling to old grudges. A compassionate person casts aside past grievances as one casts off old garments as rags defiled by disease, never to be touched again. One may think this is too much to expect of himself, yet demand exactly this from others.

Sin is an ungrateful attitude toward God, while crime is an ungrateful attitude toward fellow man. In the text for this chapter, we are dealing with man's conduct and its effect upon his neighbor. In this scripture, Jesus is teaching that we cannot enter his kingdom, populated by the holy and righteous, unless we rid our hearts of all unkind feelings toward our brethren regardless of the injury they may have inflicted upon us. This attitude is the ultimate thought of holiness in man. Cherished resentments of man against man culminates frequently in strife that ends in taking lives. This must cease when one accepts Jesus as Lord of his life.

In his Sermon on the Mount, Jesus prohibits citizens of the kingdom from returning evil for evil; rather, he said, render good for evil. No root of bitterness must be permitted to lie dormant in the heart. Much like an arrested disease not completely healed, it can spring up and be fatal.[9] The kingdom of God cannot be expanded by injuring those who injure us. There must be love and prayer for those who oppose it. In this manner true Christianity has conquered forces as crude and proud and ignorant of the truth as the Roman empire.

There has never been a moment of time since the Edenic fall that forgiveness was not needed by every soul in the human race. Sometime in every relationship there is a need for forgiveness. There remains a vital need to rid ourselves of those things which we cherish against others and lay hold on the new standard of love prescribed by Jesus.

1. Good for evil: the Christian's weapon against hostile forces.

Nonviolence is an awesomely powerful tool against sin. It is far superior to bullets for penetrating the heart to effect change. Enemies of righteousness understand how to oppose violence. Violence gives them a justification for the most calloused acts against humanity; but nonviolence as that led by the late Mohandas Gandhi and later still, by Martin Luther King, has prevailed in alleviating oppressions from powerful societies.

An enemy filled with and motivated by hatred and prejudice does not know how to effectively resist love and justice. When violence is countered with love, it awakes pity both in the ranks of the opposition and especially public opinion. There has been recent legislation prohibiting the calloused killing of baby seals in Alaska. This was prompted by pictures shown of the seal pup's pitiful innocency and their submission to clubbing by hunters. Even when only against animals, the viewing public could not tolerate such wanton violence. Herein lies the preciousness of the human race. *No other species on earth has such regard. Although marred by sin, this reflects that man was made in the image of God.*

2. Violence breeds violence.

"*They who live by the sword shall die by the sword.*" Jesus told the disciples not to use their swords to resist persecution.[10] Concerning the new coming order, the prophets foretold that swords would be beaten into plowshares and spears into pruning hooks.[11] He who cannot forgive even minor sins of others is wantonly hypocritical to ask either society or God to forgive himself. He who

minimizes his own sins, excusing himself from the error of his ways, will have both man and God rise to resist him. To fail to forgive is to bring destructive judgment upon oneself.[12]

3. Forgiveness is not always easy.

The disciple is not above his master. Jesus suffered, leaving us an example that we should follow in his steps (I Pet. 4:1). In some instances it may be extremely difficult to forgive; but it was also painful for Jesus, who on the cross asked the Father to forgive those who in ignorance of his true identity were crucifying him (Lu. 23:34).

Perhaps no one ever fully realizes the depth of his sins until he wrestles with the difficulty of forgiving others. Only when men feel the pain associated with difficult forgiveness can they in a small measure understand how their sins hurt God when he paid the staggering price his Son experienced upon the cross. Only in this way can one begin in a small way to view the enormity of God's grace (II Kgs. 6:17). One who minimizes or rationalizes his sin has little or no appreciation for the greatness of God's mercy and grace.

The dawning of repentance brings the enormity of one's sins into view. Conversion adds new and personal comfort to the beatitude, "*Blessed are they that mourn: for they shall be comforted*" (Matt. 5:4). One device Satan uses to offset God's redemptive purpose is to make one conscious of others' sins, while unaware of his own.

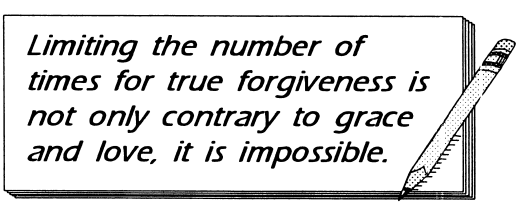
4. How often should one forgive?

> *"Then came Peter to him, and said, Lord, how oft shall my brother sin against me, and I forgive him? Til seven times? Jesus saith unto him, I say not unto thee, until seven times: but, until seventy times seven"*
> (Matt. 8:21-22).

The matter of forgiveness is very practical and is usually illustrated by some action being taken. In the text, it seems that Peter had been repeatedly aggravated by someone and may have felt that he had reached the end of human tolerance. We may hear this frustrating expression from an exasperated individual concerning an irritating neighbor: "He continually irritates me. I can not tolerate him any longer. He persistently treats me this way." Perhaps Peter was facing a similar situation and came to Jesus about his problem.

How should this matter be handled in the new kingdom of God? Peter thought seven times was enough for anybody to forgive a repeating transgressor. Had he been keeping a count on the individual? He may have wanted Jesus to suggest a specific number which would limit the obligation of forgiveness for perpetual offenders.

The rabbis had set the limit of forgiveness to three consecutive times.[13] They felt that a brother who injured another three times, asking each time for forgiveness, had been given his fair share of grace. The offended person was released from any further forgiveness. This was forgiveness under law. Peter, having caught the spirit of Jesus who always gives "*good measure, pressed down, shaken together, and running over*" (Lu. 6:38), thought he was being abundantly gracious by suggesting an increase from three to seven in the number of times the rabbis allowed. Perhaps this made him feel good about himself and he thought Jesus would praise his suggestion.



To his surprise (Peter was often greatly surprised at answers he received from Jesus), Jesus said to him, "*I say not unto thee, Until seven times: but Until seventy times seven.*" Jesus again speaks out of an abundant fullness of heart which towers over the tradition of the rabbis. Again it is in keeping with his Sermon on the Mount where he said: "*Except your righteousness exceed that of the Scribes and the Pharisees, you cannot enter the kingdom of heaven*" (Matt. 5:20).

Peter's suggestion exceeded that of the Jewish tradition, but still was a specific and limiting number. The rule in the kingdom was to be one of love, and no specific limitation can be placed on love. In the answer Jesus gave to Peter, and to all others after him, grace is abundantly magnified. Without a moment's hesitation Jesus tells us that no limitation can be placed on forgiveness, for godly love is boundless.

Seventy times seven equals four hundred ninety; but Jesus is not suggesting that even this larger number be a set figure for offering grace to the penitent. *He is teaching by hyperbole.* He is simply saying that one should forgive a penitent brother as many times as one would like for God to forgive himself. It is calling for an application of the golden rule, "*Therefore all things whatsoever ye would that men should do to you, do ye even so to them . . .*" (Matt. 7:12).

There was forgivingness under the law as well as forgiveness now under the grace of the New Testament. Forgiveness under the law occurred when a person, having transgressed against another, came asking forgiveness according to the law of injury (Ex. 21:24). It is proverbially called "an eye for an eye." But Jesus far surpasses that law when he speaks of the nature of forgiveness under grace and love. It is an attitude which has a *ready heart* for forgiveness even before one asks for forgiveness.

While on the cross Jesus exemplified divine forgiveness by praying for his enemies. We find none of those who opposed him at his crucifixion even hinting at such. In their ignorance, they thought they were doing God and the Jewish nation a favor. Yet, in the midst of their heartless sneering mockery, Jesus, divinely regal in his agony, petitioned God for their forgiveness. This is forgiveness springing from *grace all surpassing,* and not set by the letter of the law.

A Christian cannot make a count of the times he has forgiven. If forgiveness is genuine, the fault of a brother is set back to zero each time he is forgiven. It is as if nothing had happened. Due to its nature, scars may persist in the wake of the sin even though the disease which caused the scars is healed. Although double dyed as the scarlet stain in Isaiah 1:18, our transgressions are totally erased by God and have become as white as wool. He leaves no visible traces of the stain to count. The cleansed conscience is completely new before God. Christ's blood washes clean, so each forgiveness is the very first occurrence because no trace of any past transgressions exists.

5. What God's forgiveness is like.

The Bible speaks of God's amazing forgiveness for man in various beautiful metaphors. Note the following comparisons biblical writers use on the divine removal of sins.

(a) *God can wash doubled dyed sins as white as wool.* The prophet Isaiah (1:18) declared: "*Though your sins be as scarlet, they shall be as white as snow; though they be red as crimson, they shall be as wool.*" In those olden days crimson was a color that faded terribly, but finally someone learned that "double dying" crimson made it to hold its color without fading. Isaiah is saying to Israel that even though her sins were "double died fast," if she would only repent God would wash and renew her to spotlessness.

(b) *God will cover your sins even though they are as bright and glaring as the sun.* God says again through Isaiah's pen (Isa. 44:22), that he could blot out Israel's sins as a cloud would blot out the sun, if they would only turn from them.

(c) *God will place your sins in a place that*

can never be reached. David knew the need for great forgiveness. His sins of adultery and murder were known everywhere. With a contrite heart he wrote in Psalms 103:12: "*As far as the east is from the west, so hath he removed our transgressions from us.*" One may wonder why the Holy Spirit inspired David to say that sins could be removed as far away as east is from west. Why not from north to south? It may be because there are no polar regions for east and west. Both the north and south have polar areas. One can travel to the north pole, arrive there, pass it, and then travel south. East and west are not like this. Travel east forever and one will never arrive at a point where he is traveling west. The Holy Spirit says God's removal of the penitent's sins is like that. He places them where they can never be reached.

(d) *God can place any sin where it can never be retrieved.* Micah, an 8th century B.C. prophet, says this of God's forgiveness in 2:19: "*He will turn again, he will have compassion upon us; he will subdue our iniquities; and thou wilt cast our sins into the depth of the sea.*" Think of the depths of the ocean. Huge mountain ranges lie on its floor. Suppose you are sailing along the ocean's surface miles above the highest mountain on the ocean's floor. As you look overboard at the beautiful expanse of the ocean, you accidently drop a coin. You watch it hit the water and disappear below the foamy rolling waves. What chance do you have of ever retrieving the coin? None! you say. Exactly, and that is the idea presented by Micah.

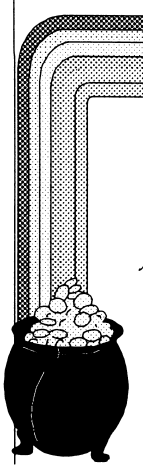
The sins of all penitent souls in Christ are gone forever. To have all sin over and done with forever is what every soul mourning over past sins desires. That is why Peter was so wrong in suggesting a count. If limited forgiveness had been set for a person, people with tendencies to hold grudges would be keeping close scores on personal injuries to make absolutely sure when their moment of grace had expired. Then, these would take great delight in wielding unmerciful vengeance.

Had Peter understood that no second opportunity to forgive can ever exist, because true forgiveness wipes out the first occasion, he would have known that a second account could not be made, much less a seventh. When one truly forgives an injury, it is so far removed in offense (if not in deed) that he could never make an accumulative record against an individual because the first offense is eradicated.

Of course this does not mean that the deed cannot be remembered. Some sins may call for imprisonment. The consequences of the deed may be visited upon the individual and their family for years. That which is eradicated is *the grievance* against the forgiven brother or sister. A penitent rejoices in this kind of forgiveness because it brings peace and makes it easier for him to be more patient at reoccurring sins. Granted, such forgiveness is truly difficult, but with God's Spirit abiding within the Christian, he is enabled to do it. Such a beautiful attribute is rooted in the divine nature and glorifies the kingdom of heaven.

6. The parable of the unforgiving servant.

"*Therefore the kingdom of heaven is likened unto a certain king, which would take account of his servants*" (Matt. 18:15ff.). Here Jesus is speaking again in parabolic form to further stress the principle of forgiveness in the upcoming kingdom of heaven. Just as



A new commandment I give unto you, That ye love one another; as I have loved you, that ye also love one another. By this shall all men know that ye are my disciples, if ye love one another. (John 13:34-35)

there can be no citizenship in the kingdom of heaven without receiving the forgiveness of God, just so there can be no citizenship in the kingdom without forgiving others. Jesus relates the following parable to illustrate this principle.

And when he had begun to reckon, one was brought unto him, which owed him ten thousand talents. But forasmuch as he had not to pay, his lord commanded him to be sold, and his wife, and children, and all that he had, and payment to be made. The servant therefore fell down, and worshipped him, saying, Lord, have patience with me, and I will repay thee all. Then the lord of that servant was moved with compassion, and loosed him, and forgave the debt. But the same servant went out, and found one of his fellowservants, which owed him an hundred pence: and he laid hands on him, and took him by the throat, saying, Pay me that thou owest. And his fellowservant fell down at his feet, and besought him, saying, Have patience with me, and I will pay thee all. And he would not: but went and cast him into prison, till he should pay the debt. So when his fellowservants saw what was done, they were sorry, and came and told unto their lord all that was done. Then his lord, after that he had called him, said unto him, O thou wicked servant, I forgave thee all that debt, because thou desiredst me: Shouldest not thou also have had compassion on thy fellowservant, even as I had pity on thee? And his lord was wroth, and delivered him to the tormentors, till he should pay all that was due unto him. So likewise shall my heavenly Father do also unto you, if ye from your hearts forgive not every one his brother their trespasses (Matt. 18:23-25).

In an oriental despotism, as pictured in this parable, subordinates to the king, if not in name, were virtually his slaves because their property and lives were subject to his will. This indebted servant had evidently defaulted in his obligations. His arrears continued to accumulate as he failed to make payment to the king. Finally, he was called to answer for his debts and not being able to pay, he was to be sold with all that he had. He was in complete bankruptcy without any Chapter Eleven. Under Jewish law, a man could be sold for his debt, perhaps along with his family (Lev. 25:39-41; II Kgs. 4:1; Neh. 5:7-8; Isa. 50:1).

The servant, under threat of imprisonment, a terrible ordeal in those days, convinced his lord, if given time, he would repay his debt. This seems to be a promise that would be impossible for him to keep as the sum equalled about ten million dollars.

Perhaps, due to the eloquence of his persuasive ability, his impoverished condition and the tender compassion of the king, he was forgiven the entire debt which was sizable even for a king. The fact that the king was moved with such compassion that he forgave him the debt has been an occasion of many peculiar and adverse interpretations. In application, it only means that we can never repay the awesome debt of sin we owe to God, but when we penitently ask for mercy, he will forgive all (Rom. 5:8-9).

7. Ingratitude and unforgiveness—their fearful results.

"*But the same servant went out, and found one of his fellowservants, which owed him a hundred pence: and he laid hands on him, and took him by the throat, saying, Pay me that thou owest*" (Matt. 18:28).

This servant who had just been released from a staggering obligation, dealt severely with his fellowservant who owed him about twenty dollars, infinitely small in comparison to the debt his lord had forgiven him. The previous moment of close dealing between himself and his lord had passed. The man had completely forgotten that solemn judgment which he escaped only through

mercy. He had been frightened, but not converted.

In dealing with his debtor, the unforgiving servant acted contrary to the spirit of forgiveness which he had sought from his lord. His fellowservant fell down at his feet, just as the unforgiving servant had done before his lord, and plaintively uttered the same words: "*Have patience with me and I will pay thee all.*" How could the unforgiving servant not recall this as the very statement made by himself earlier? The only difference was, he had begged for a huge debt to be forgiven himself while his debtor asked forgiveness of only a pittance.

Refusing to have patience and mercy with his fellowservant, the unforgiving servant immediately cast his debtor into prison. He who had received mercy offers only cruelty to his fellowman.

"*But the fellowservants saw what was done. . . .*" Let all be aware, the community is watching! The parable shows the reaction of the unforgiving servant's neighbors to be quick. Fellow citizens will not tolerate such acts of injustice. Society generally reacts mercifully to those who are merciful, but will refuse mercy to the tyrants. "*Blessed are the merciful, for they shall receive mercy,*" and "*With what judgment ye judge, ye shall be judged: and with what measure ye mete, it shall be measured to you again,*" are the words of Jesus (Matt. 5: 7; 7:2).

There is a story of a teenage daughter who became offended when her mother reprimanded her. She ran through the back door to a place out behind the house where the land sloped off into a distant canyon. She shouted, "I hate you, I hate you, I hate you." Immediately the same words were heard ricochetting about in the hills. The young lady burst into tears.

Her mother, who had been watching from the kitchen door, observed what had happened. She immediately ran to her daughter, embraced her, and shouted out into the canyon: "I love you, I love you, I love you." When the same words immediately returned the mother whispered to her daughter, "Remember, whatever you speak to the world will come right back to you." This is also the ancient lesson of the parable.

The heartless man must have been surprised to have been called by his master to answer for his actions toward his fellowservant. He not once thought others would be repelled by his ingratitude and report him to his lord. There are those who are crying

The Kind Old Grocer

We recall a kind old grocer,
When the sugar he would pour,
How it tipped the scales to balance,
Then he'd add a little more,
And his business, how it prospered,
Folks were always in his store,
For he gave them honest measure,
Then he'd add a little more.
So it is with life my brother,
We would write a better score,
When we've done what is expected,
If we'd add a little more.

—Anonymous

If I have wounded any soul today,
If I have caused one foot to go astray,
If I have walked in my own wilful way,
Dear Lord, forgive.

If I have uttered idle words or vain,
If I have turned aside from want or pain,
Lest I myself should suffer through the strain,
Dear Lord, forgive.

—C. M. Battersby

out daily to the Lord of all over injustices practiced by their fellowmen. In the parable the lord's language the second time is straight to the point and judgment is rendered according to the unforgiving servant's measure: "*Should you not have done unto your fellowservant as I have done unto you?*" The lord was only saying to the servant that if he expected the Golden Rule to be applied to himself, he should be willing to practice it. This is equally true of all.

The lord wrathfully delivered the unforgiving servant to the tormentors (the ancient collection agency), until he should pay all the debt. The ungrateful servant reaped what he had sown. When one practices injustice, later, when he needs it, as he always will, both the world and God will remember (Gal. 6:8-9). Arrested criminals who have violated the civil rights of others cry out for their own rights (Matt. 6:12); *but payday eventually arrives.* This is the central thrust of this parable. It may be summarized in Jesus' words: "*So likewise shall my heavenly Father do also unto you, if ye from your hearts forgive not every one his brother their trespasses.*"

8. The principle of forgiveness demonstrated in prayer.

Jesus taught the disciples an exemplary prayer in Matthew 6:6-13. Of all the beautiful things listed in this prayer as appropriate before God, the only principle Jesus felt needing further emphasis was the nature of forgiveness. Perhaps no other Christian principle is so commonly abused. In this exemplary prayer Jesus teaches that men should pray in this manner: "*Forgive us of our debts, as we forgive our debtors.*" After the close of this prayer, the only additional comment concerning it was on forgiveness: "*For if ye forgive not men their trespasses, neither will your heavenly father forgive your trespasses*" (Matt. 6:14).

This is the key for divine forgiveness: if you want to be forgiven by God, you must always be willing to forgive a penitent person who has sinned against you.

References

1. Romans. 3:23
2. Matthew 1:21
3. Ezekiel 18:18-19
4. Acts 1:25
5. Psalms 51
6. Matthew 25:37-46
7. John 13:34-35
8. Galatians 5:22ff.
9. Hebrews 12:15
10. John 18:36
11. Isaiah 2:4
12. Matthew 11:26
13. William Barclay, *Daily Bible Study Series*, See notes on Matthew 18. *Op. cit.*, page 166

Questions for Chapter Fourteen

1. What awesome choice has God given man regarding his Creator?
2. By what process did Judas "choose his own place?"
3. What lessons on forgiveness are illustrated by David in Psalms 51?
4. How can Christians best resist the forces opposing the kingdom?
5. What is the law of forgiveness?
6. Why is it impossible to set a limiting number of times on forgiveness?
7. Discuss the parable of the unforgiving servant.

Acceptable Worship

1. *Do not forsake the Lord's Day assembly (Heb. 10:25).*
2. *Prepare yourself before worship to meet Jesus in the spirit.*
3. *Enter the assembly with expectancy to receive God's blessings.*
4. *Worship God in spirit and in truth (Jno. 4:24; Rev. 1:10)).*
5. *Pray with the spirit (I Cor. 14:15).*
6. *Sing with the spirit (I Cor. 14:15).*
7. *Examine yourself (not others) as you observe the Lord's Supper (I Cor. 11:28).*
8. *Let God have his way. Have a forgiving spirit toward every brother or sister.*
9. *Give as you have been prospered (I Cor. 16:1-2).*
10. *Leave with your uplifted spirit determined to serve faithfully.*

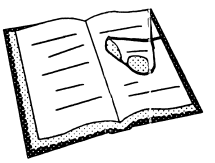
Outline of Chapter Fifteen

Christ's Ministry of Healing

I. The Purpose of Christ's Ministry
   A. Jesus refused to parade his power
   B. Signs were to confirm the spoken word of forgiveness
      1. The message that was confirmed by the Holy Spirit.
      2. The message that was not confirmed by the Holy Spirit

II. The Compassionate Christ
   A. The "disciple indeed"

—Read This—



Whether is it easier to say to the sick of the palsy, Thy sins be forgiven thee; or to say, Arise, and take up thy bed, and walk? But that ye may know that the Son of man hath power on earth to forgive sins, (he saith to the sick of the palsy,) I say unto thee, Arise, and take up thy bed, and go thy way into thine house.

230 ***And immediately he arose, took up the bed, and went forth before them all; insomuch that they were all amazed, and glorified God, saying, We never saw it on this fashion.*** **—Mark 2:9-12**

ORD OF THE SABBATH

Chapter Fifteen

Christ's Ministry of Healing

(Matt. 9:1-8; Mk. 16:15-20; Lu. 4:17-21; Jno. 5; 9)

I walked a mile with Laughter,
And she chatted all the way,
But she left me none the wiser,
For all she had to say.
I walked a mile with Sorrow,
And n'er a word said she,
But oh the profound wisdom,
That sorrow brought to me.
—Anonymous

1. THE PURPOSE OF HEALING

The stated purpose of Jesus' mission was ***to save people from their sins.***[1] This sounds very academic to many Bible students; nevertheless, this would be very difficult to determine from all the billboards advertising modern healing ministries. Extensive time and advertisement are devoted to promote healing campaigns, and while soul salvation is implied, *it takes a back seat to "great miracles of physical healings."* Based on the tremendous emphasis placed on boasting of physical healings by radio and TV evangelists, one could easily be deceived into believing that the compassion of Jesus for physical ailments far outweighed his concern for spiritual sickness. "Electric evangelists" consume most of their airtime advertising great miracles of healings among the invalid, while having them walk across the stage. Miracles *"which can happen to you"* are merchandised to the desperate for *"love offerings."* These offerings, which net several hundred millions of dollars annually, come from the desperately ill, many on fixed incomes. Such evangelists live most luxurious life-styles, drive luxury automobiles, wear the most expensive watches, live lavishly, sport designer clothing and have extravagant dwellings.

The New Testament relates many true beautiful instances where God's healing power restored the ill, healed the crippled, and raised the dead to life. Nothing is more sacred and precious than to bow in prayer by the bedside of a believer hovering precariously in a delicate balance between life and death and invoke God's healing powers. James 5:15 comforts all by telling us that our compassionate God will heal the sick. Obviously, this does not mean on every occasion of illness, or all would be healed and death would be abolished. At healing revivals, when one who desires to be healed fails to receive his miracle, it is explained by saying that he just has insufficient faith. Yet, the most faithful saints die, therefore a lack of faith cannot always be the problem. While there is nothing more sacred, reverent and scriptural than praying for the sick within the will of God, there is also nothing more shameful, irreverent, and more cheapening of the preaching and healing ministry

of Jesus than to peddle miracles like flea-market merchandise (See II Cor. 2:17 RSV). Although there is no scientific confirmation for these claimed miraculous healings, "praying partners" are begged to contribute "love offerings" to continue the evangelist's great work. These miracle sellers hide their greed behind the healing power of the Holy Spirit while they tarnish the true Gospel with their lusts. Under elementary examination of the New Testament healings, modern fake healers all fall short of the real power of the Holy Spirit of the first century. In the New Testament, the apostolic power to heal the sick was complete and accompanied with the power to resurrect the dead. A few have tried this in the past several years only to fail and be exposed as false teachers. Only when modern "faith healing" evangelists begin raising the dead, at least occasionally, and not confine their gifts to subjective claims, will it be known that they have the same Spirit and power as the apostles.

Still, they prey on the desperate and overly credulous for support of their lucrative theatrics. Such would turn anew the Father's house into a den of merchandise. The most sceptical observers in the New Testament were not left to doubt that a genuine miracle had occurred.[2] It was clear, even to Jesus' enemies, that it took a supernatural power to do the works he did. It is important to realize that the power of the Holy Spirit was to lead the disciples to the truth of Jesus' divine origin and messiahship.

A. Jesus refused to parade his power

He did not resort to the sensational grandstanding of physical healings. It would not have been thought of by him, or of his apostles, to make a display of various paraphernalia of the handicapped such as crutches, walking canes, etc., for the purpose of advertising a "healing campaign." As we have already seen, Jesus rejected such a dramatic display of the Holy Spirit's power when he was challenged to do so by Satan in the wilderness temptation.

Jesus did not come to rid the world of arthritis and broken bones, but to rid the heart of sin. His first advent was not to destroy death; *this is the last enemy which will be destroyed at his second coming.*[3] His first advent was to pay the supreme sacrifice for man's spiritual healing. The angel's annunciation to Mary was not, "Thou shall call his name Jesus: for he shall rid the world of disease and suffering; it was, "Thou shall call his name Jesus: *for he shall save people from their sins.*" It is true that Jesus did heal all manner of diseases to confirm his power, but this was *secondary* to the soul-saving purpose for which he came.[4] Jesus needs no additional confirmation of his power today. The resurrection is his final authority (Jude 3).

Signs performed by Jesus were to support and pave the way for the divine message he came to deliver. This is especially noticeable in the Gospel of John where he performed the miracle of feeding the five thousand, then followed it with a lesson on the bread of life. He healed the blind man on the Sabbath day, then taught a lesson on his being the true light of the world; he raised Lazarus from the dead, then taught them that he was the resurrection and the life.

Modern faith healers place the healing of the body in the foreground by parading pseudo healings before the public, while they beg for love offerings to keep them "on the air." They resort to such base tactics as previously obtaining personal information from healing candidates at registration desks, and later amazing everyone during the healing charade by appearing to prophetically reveal this information which has been transmitted into a receiver in the ear of the star evangelist.[5]

On stage the healer preys upon his audience's curiosity to witness something sensational. For some people, faith is not sufficient; they need something *visible* to bolster their faith. The faith healer appeals to the audience somewhat like this. First, he is informed through his ear receiver that a Joe Black is in the audience who has back trouble. Second, the faith healer begins feigning direct revelation from God. As he gazes over

the audience, he speaks: "Ahh, there is a Joe in the audience, I believe there is a Joe Black—Joe Black isn't it? Hey Joe, stand up." Joe stands. "Joe, you've been going to the doctor with back trouble, haven't you?"

Joe says yes and the audience responds with a thunderous applause. Sometimes there is a roll of drums from the orchestra. Of course Joe has back trouble. He has already revealed this at the registration desk. This information has been transmitted into the healer's small ear receiver. *Fantastic isn't it!*

The faith healer continues: "Joe, these doctors haven't been able to help you, have they? Well, let's not delay any longer, you have finally come to the right Doctor to be healed. Come on down and let Jesus take care of that old back for you right now!"

With a great deal of physical effort and assistance from loved ones, Joe moves down the aisle to the front and stops before the healer. The evangelist continues his routine.

"Joe, you believe God can heal you, don't you?"

"Yes," Joe quietly replies.

"Joe, you love God, don't you?"

"Yes sir, I surely do!"

"Who are you going to give the glory to, Joe, when you are healed?"

"God," Joe says, now with tears in his eyes.

The evangelist laughs and repeats to the audience with great emphasis that *Joe-is-going-to-give-God-the-glory* for his healing. He then continues with leading questions:

"Joe, you have waited long enough. Let's not delay your healing any longer. You are ready to receive your healing, are you not?"

"Yes sir, I am," Joe meekly replies.

At this, the evangelist places his hand on Joe's back or shoulder, sometimes on the forehead. He then *squints his eyes hard together* and begins to command the demons of sickness with a loud voice to depart from Joe's body. Sometimes the rebuke of the demon is supported with a meaningless jargon called an "*unknown tongue.*" Think what this can do to the sincere and curious! Suddenly the evangelist gives Joe a violent rap that tips him backward and shouts:

"In the name of Jesus, I command you infamous demons of hell that are afflicting this man's spine—be gone! Be healed!"

"Now, how do you feel Joe?" the preacher continues. "Your back feels much better doesn't it Joe?'

"Yes sir, it does," Joe agrees, not wanting to let God, the preacher, the audience and himself down.

"How about the pain Joe, is it gone?"

"It feels much better," Joe responds.

"How about that, ladies and gentlemen? Come on now, everybody praise God! Let's all give God the glory."

The audience thunders an applause once again with shouts of amen and hallelujah coming from everywhere as Joe is led off the stage by attendants. The orchestra plays loudly. The star evangelist has feigned prophetic information from God and has demonstrated his special divine healing powers. Depending upon the extent of TV coverage, the magnetism and dramatic appeal of the emoting evangelist, the "love offerings" gained through these religious charades keep the multi-millions flowing. All healing evangelists may not go to these extremes, but many have their own methods for applying pressure to get audiences to give. One nationally known evangelist exclaimed: "*God will take me home if I fail to receive this money.*" The amount he had set was in the millions. Another pleads that *God's precious message* will be put off the air while the devil gets to rule the airways if love offerings of ten dollars are more are not sent to him immediately. The pleas are infinitely varied and highly effective.[6] If it were anything else other than religion, this would be looked upon as a crass con game.

The ministry of Jesus and first century evangelists included genuine physical healing. But healing the sick was intended to confirm the message as God's word. Without proof, few would have believed an itinerate young carpenter traveling about the countryside not having any credentials from Jerusalem, destitute of formal education and hailing from a small village with an ill reputation like Nazareth.[7] Who was this rustic Jew going about the countryside forgiving people their sins? Just who did he claim to be? Only

God could forgive sins, they scorned.[8] So it is no real wonder that the educated ministry looked upon him as deranged and blasphemous. Yet, they could not deny that Jesus performed miracles that no mere man could do. Even so, they refused to accept the possibility that his miracles were divinely empowered.[9] So there was only one alternative, they were forced to charge him with performing his deeds by the power of Satan.[10] But this presented an even greater problem because Jesus' miraculous deeds were acts of mercy. By attributing these acts to demonic powers, *they were attributing the mercy of the Holy Spirit to Satan.* To see God, one must be able to feel compassion and mercy: for God is love and mercy. If one blinds himself to the source of mercy, he blinds himself to God. Jesus said, "*Walk while ye have the light, that ye may be children of light.*" Then John adds, "*But though he had done so many miracles before them, yet they believed not on him.*"[11]

While they could not deny the miracle, they did not want the message behind the miracle. However, the message and the miracle went inseparably together. What God hath joined together, man must not put asunder.[12] Consequently, in rejecting the message of light, they had to reject the miracle as being a miracle of light as well. It is of major importance to understand that the purpose behind the healing miracles of Jesus was to confirm the message as divine, and that message was: *Jesus had divine power to forgive sins.*[13] Many desire the blessing of the miracle while rejecting the meaning of the message *confirmed by the miracle.*[14] But for one to covet the material blessing of a miracle without regard for the Word of the Holy Spirit who performed that miracle, is grossly hypocritical. One is absolutely assured that a professed miracle healer is a fake if he denies the written Word of God which has already been confirmed by true Bible miracles. How may a person know when a proclaimed miracle is not of God? *When the performer of that miracle rejects any part of the word of God which has already been confirmed by genuine miracles of the first century.* Many miracles and wonders have been performed in history. Pharaoh's magicians could copy Moses' miracle by making their rods turn into serpents. The New Testament attributes awesome power to Satan, saying that he has "*all power and signs and lying wonders, and with all deceivableness of unrighteousness in them that perish; because they received not the love of the truth, that they might be saved.*"[15] This passage states that some are deceived by miracle performers because they did not want the message of truth.

According to Paul, those performing these signs were not teaching the truth, therefore they are said to be the deceptive signs of Satan. Just because a miracle has seemingly been performed does not mean that the speaker's message is from God. And we might add, just because a speaker quotes some passage from the Bible does not mean his claimed miracle is from God. Satan himself performs signs of great wonders and is quite good at quoting scripture when it suits his wishes.[16] The Holy Spirit's miracles were acts of mercy or acts of judgment (Ac.5: 1-10; 13:10) and were always consistent with the revelation of the Holy Spirit. We now have the Bible as the full revelation of the Holy Spirit in its perfected state (I Cor. 13:8-13; II Tim. 3:16-17; II Pet. 1:3; Gal. 1:8-9).

B. Signs were to confirm the inspired word

The Holy Spirit has confirmed its own mes-

When the last man died upon whom the apostles laid their hands to receive miraculous gifts, miraculous healing ceased. Read Acts 8 carefully. Philip had to send for the apostles to convey the Spirit's miraculous gift.

sage by genuine miracles. Any preached message that contradicts or denies the biblical revelation of the Holy Spirit cannot be from God (Rom. 16:18). Note the contrast shown below in the message that has been confirmed by the Holy Spirit and the one which has not been confirmed.

1. The message that was confirmed by the Holy Spirit.

√ THE WORD WAS ONCE DELIVERED TO THE SAINTS (JUDE 3).

√ THE WORD IS OF NO PRIVATE INTERPRETATION (II PET. 1:20B).

√ ONLY ONE SCRIPTURAL CHURCH WAS BUILT BY CHRIST (MATT. 16:18; ACTS 20:28).

√ A PREMIUM WAS PLACED ON THE TRUE DOCTRINE (MT. 15:8-9; GAL. 1:8-9).

√ HE THAT BELIEVETH AND IS BAPTIZED SHALL BE SAVED (MARK 16:16; MATT. 28:18-20).

√ A DISCIPLE CAN FALL BY TRANSGRESSION AND BE LOST (ACTS 1:25).

√ THE EARLY CHURCH CELEBRATED A WEEKLY COMMUNION (ACTS 20:1-7).

√ SUPERNATURAL GIFTS OF THE SPIRIT WERE TO GRADUALLY VANISH AWAY WITH THE COMPLETION OF THE "PERFECT" BIBLE (I COR. 13:8-13).

2. The following message was not confirmed by the Holy Spirit.

√ CONTINUOUS REVELATION AFTER THE NEW TESTAMENT WAS WRITTEN, E.G. "GOD SPOKE TO ME," ETC. (SEE GAL. 1:8-9).

√ HAVING DIFFERENT ACCEPTABLE INTERPRETATIONS OF GOD'S WORD (I PET. 1:21).

√ CHURCHES FOUNDED BY MEN, TEACHING THE DOCTRINES OF MEN (MT. 16:18; EPH. 4:4-5).

√ EXORCISM, THE CASTING OUT OF DEMONS, ALONG WITH OTHER GREAT WORKS IN THE NAME OF JESUS WHICH ARE OFFERED AS PROOF THAT A PRIVATE DOCTRINE IS DIVINE (MATT. 7:22).

These four points, plus many, many others depict gross inconsistencies between the preached message of many today and that original message confirmed "once for all" by the Holy Spirit. Modern miracle workers not only oppose the teaching of the Holy Spirit in the New Testament, but frequently oppose each other in doctrine. The Holy Spirit has never taught division or sanctioned it by a miracle. This would make the Holy Spirit oppose himself, and a house divided against itself can not stand. Paul affirms that there is only one Spirit, and that by one Spirit we are all baptized into one body which is Christ's church.[17] We are to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace.

Paul pleads against divisions among believers, that we all speak the same thing, and be perfectly joined together.[18] The apostle Paul was inspired to write I Corinthians 1:10 where he condemns division. Therefore modern miraculous claims intended to confirm and approve religious division cannot be the work of the Holy Spirit.

If modern miracles serve to confirm that division and denominational doctrine are the work of the Holy Spirit, then Paul was not inspired to write I Corinthians as he claimed he was. If the Holy Spirit inspired Paul and He is the source of such modern miracles, then the Holy Spirit contradicts himself.

"For the time will come," said Paul to Timothy, "when they will not endure sound doctrine; but after their own lusts shall they heap unto themselves teachers, having itching ears. And they shall turn away their ears from the truth, and shall be turned unto fables."[19] One must desire nothing to be preached but the confirmed truth of the Bible and avoid modern miracle workers who seek to establish their own doctrines by decep-

tion.[20]

The Holy Spirit confirmed the records of the New Testament writers. He inspired men to make the infallible records that compose the New Testament. This record of the Holy Spirit guides us into all truth. Prior to the completion of these writings, the early church had only the oral word of inspired men. This was adequate while the church was small, but the growing church needed apostolic doctrine immediately available for the outlying congregations. Problems abounded in the remote regions of the newly established church. Travel was slow and the apostles could not be everywhere. The writing of the canon of the New Testament was needed to meet their expanding needs (Jno. 20:30ff.).

The New Testament was finished and we have had it in its completed form since the close of the first century. After the perfect New Testament was completed, there was no further need for confirmation of additional revelation. We now "*walk by faith and not by sight.*" This faith, it proclaims, "*comes by hearing and hearing by the word of God.*" [21]

As the New Testament came closer to its completion, miracles began to disappear. Rather than heal Timothy of his stomach ailment, Paul advised him to "*drink no longer water, but a little wine*" for his stomach's sake.[22] No miracles are recorded in many of the last epistles of the New Testament.

Regarding this, Paul said, "*Charity never faileth: but whether there be prophecies, they shall fail; whether there be tongues, they shall cease; whether there be knowledge, it shall vanish away. For we know in part, and we prophesy in part. But when that which is perfect is come, then that which is in part shall be done away. When I was a child I spoke as a child, I understood as a child, I thought as a child: but when I became a man, I put away childish things. For now we see through a glass, darkly; but then face to face: now I know in part; but then shall I know even as also I am known. And now abideth faith, hope, charity, these three; but the greatest of these is charity.*"[23]

11. THE COMPASSIONATE CHRIST

Jesus deeply felt the pains of others suffering about him. This is implicit in the word "compassion" as it comes to us through the Latin language. It is taken from two words which, when translated into English, mean "to suffer with." Jesus can be said to have borne other's wounds in himself, to have wept their tears and partaken of their weaknesses. Speaking of this, Matthew says, "*Himself took our iniquities, and bare our sickness.*"[24]

Obviously, Jesus did not heal everybody, not even the apostle Paul. After three prayerful pleas, Jesus told him that his grace had been sufficient for him (II Cor. 12:9). There were thousands of ill, isolated lepers, demon possessed, the lame and the blind in every city, yet Jesus never led a sensationally advertised "healing campaign." The continued presence of sickness in the church cannot be explained by a lack of faith in ailing members. Power for healing was not always contingent upon the presence of faith in the recipient, and conversely, was not always given when there was a great amount of faith.

Jesus restored Malchus' ear, the servant of the high priest, after Peter had severed it from him in the garden of Gethsemane on the night of Christ's arrest.[25] This man had no faith whatsoever. They had come to arrest Jesus as an imposter and criminal. On the other hand, as we have noted, the Lord refused to heed Paul's request to remove the thorn in his flesh, a man of gigantic faith.[26]

Suffering, pain and death are with us until Jesus returns. The last enemy to be destroyed is death. Regardless of the mag-

nanimous compassion of Christ and the unlimited love of God, suffering still abounds.

It evidently serves a high purpose in the overall discipline of humanity which we cannot comprehend in our fallible minds. God sees the overall picture and knows what strokes the brush must make to finish the painting. Paul said, "*His will is made perfect in our weakness.*"[27]

A person who suffers quietly and patiently in righteousness has a tremendous softening effect upon one's heart. Sometimes God needs a suffering servant to manifest his strength in weakness. Disciples indeed accept this, feeling worthy to walk in the same foot steps as the Master.

A. The "disciple indeed."

The "*disciple indeed*" (Jno. 8:31) does not question the infinite wisdom of God. He may pray for the alleviation of suffering, as Christ and Paul, but knows he must drink willingly of the bitter cup when it cannot be removed.*

The "disciple indeed" knows that the most important thing is not to be delivered from the afflictions of the body, but the destruction of the soul after death. The sufferings after death are eternal, while pain in this life is but for the moment. The "disciple indeed" realizes deliverance from eternal suffering is worth bearing anything in this fleeting world. God would not tolerate for one instant the sufferings of his people on earth if it had no purpose whatsoever in the divine economy.

Much of the suffering we must endure is caused by the persistent sins of the world. The adamant stubbornness to put away some sins serves to increase suffering in successive generations. One shudders to think what effect AIDS may have upon the world. But it is a disease resulting from a lust against nature itself: *men with men burning in their own lusts spawned this.*[28]

When the Surgeon General announced that tobacco was a principle source of cancer, warnings were issued on every advertisement. Advertisements are posted everywhere asking people to stop smoking. Although it is known that AIDS is principally caused by the perverted sin of sodomy, unlike the campaign against smoking, the chief response has not been a campaign for abstinence, but to launch a desperate search for a chemical cure of the disease. How nice! No changes in sinful life style would be necessary if a prevention could be found.

Why not advertise warnings against the dangers of homosexuality on billboards and TV ads and in public places as they have the warnings against smoking and drugs? It is much more lethal. Why not simply say no to this killer? Surely we must see that this is a deeply ingrained spiritual problem? When we have suffered enough, there will be a less hypocritical approach to this grave problem.

Suffering will be with us as long as sin remains with us. Legislation does not remove lust which is the god of this world. The only cure for this sickness is by cooperating with the Spirit of God. Sin is a self-destructive disease. Like any deadly parasite, it thrives on man's unwillingness to control his lusts until it destroys the very host upon which it depends for nurture. Suffering is not an arbitrary punishment from God. It is true that much of our suffering is due to personal sin. If we sow to the wind, we shall reap the whirlwind, and "*he that soweth to his flesh, shall of his flesh reap corruption . . . .*"[29] Such divine warnings are to enlighten us that we may avoid sin and suffering. They are not threats made by a vindictive God.

*Confirming the souls of the disciples, and exhorting them to continue in the faith, and that we must through much tribulation enter into the kingdom of God. —ACTS 14:22

The book of Job was written long ago to refute the belief that all suffering is a result of a righteous person's past sins. Each suffers from the universal plague of sin. Its curse is upon all things.[30] But if there is a universal curse because of sin, there is also a universal blessing that can be shared by all who believe and accept Jesus. "*Wherefore, as by one man sin entered into the world, and death by sin, and so death passed upon all men, for all have sinned . . .*"[31] but as the curse came, so also came its end in the blessing in Christ: "*For if by one man's offence death reigned by one; much more they which receive abundance of grace and of the gift of righteousness shall reign in life by one, Jesus Christ.*"[32]

One day, praise God, all suffering will be over and if found in Christ, one will never have to suffer again. Whatever we must endure for a moment is little compared to what Christ endured that he might "*bring many sons unto glory.*"[33] If suffering had to be endured by our Lord in order to bring us unto glory, then we should be willing to bear it also to take his word of salvation to those suffering all over the world.

References

1. Luke 19:10
2. John 3:1; 11:47-48
3. I Corinthians 15:26
4. Matthew 1:2
5. Documented and revealed by a guest on the Johnny Carson show on NBC Television, June, 1987
6. In early 1987, a healing evangelist in Tulsa, Oklahoma claimed that God would take his life if those in the TV audience did not remit a huge sum of money by a deadline.
7. John 7:15
8. Luke 5:21
9. John 11:47-48
10. Matthew 12:24
11. John 12:36-38
12. Matthew 19:6
13. Matthew 9:6
14. John 6:26-27
15. II Thessalonians 2:9-10
16. Matthew 4:6
17. Ephesians 4:4-5; 1:22; 5:23-26; I Corinthians 12:13
18. I Corinthians 1:10
19. II Timothy 4:3-4
20. I Peter 4:11
21. II Corinthians 5:7; Romans 10:17
22. I Timothy 5:23
23. I Corinthians 13:8-10
24. Matthew 8:17
25. Luke 22:50-51
26. II Corinthians 12:7ff.
27. II Corinthians 12:9
28. Romans 1:26-28
29. Hosea 8:7; Galatians 6:8
30. Genesis 3:13-19
31. Romans 5:12
32. Romans 5:7
33. Hebrews 2:10

Questions for Chapter Fifteen

1. What is the stated purpose of Jesus' Mission?
2. What is the major theme of many TV evangelists' programs?
3. Discuss the correlation of the powers of healing and raising the dead.
4. What purpose lay behind the signs Jesus performed?
5. What attitude did the Jews have regarding the miracles of Jesus?
6. Name at least seven doctrinal points that have been confirmed by the Holy Spirit.
7. What are some modern doctrinal contentions that are not confirmed by the Holy Spirit?
8. What is the most important thing to the "disciple indeed"?
9. Was faith always a condition for receiving healing? Support your answer.

—Read This—

Ho, every one that thirsteth, come ye to the waters, and he that hath no money; come ye, buy, and eat; yea, come, buy wine and milk without money and without price. —ISA. 55:1

Forasmuch as ye know that ye were not redeemed with corruptible things, as silver and gold, from your vain conversation received by tradition from your fathers. —1 Pet. 1:18

Outline for Chapter Sixteen

Jesus and Daily Life

I. Jesus' Regard for Man's Daily Living
   A. Deistic views
   B. Man is both religious and social
      1. The Gospel speaks of Jesus' interest in daily affairs
   C. The home as Jesus viewed it
      1. The Jews' high esteem for family life
      2. Jesus' contributions toward the sanctity of life
         (a) Most of Jesus' life was viewed within the family unit
         (b) Jesus' teaching is filled with analogies of home life
         (c) Jesus elevated the social status of women and children

II. The Lord's Attitude Toward Money and Possessions
   A. The rich farmer
   B. The widow's mite
   C. The Lord never condemned the possession of wealth
   D. The Lazarus of Luke 16

III. Jesus and Prayer Life

ESUS CARES

Chapter Sixteen

Jesus and Daily Life

Matt. 6:5-34; Mk. 8:1-8; Lu. 9:10-17; Jno. 2:1-11

I would like to tell you what I think of Jesus,
Since I found in Him a friend so strong and true;
I would tell you how he changed my life completely,
He did something that no other friend could do.
—C. F. Weigle

1. JESUS' REGARD FOR MAN'S DAILY LIVING

A. Deistic views

There are those who seem to think that Jesus had little concern for the social affairs of humanity. Deism informs us, in a matter of thinking, that after creating the world, God went on his way putting everything out of his mind. Those who hold that Jesus had little or no concern for man's social functions stress that Jesus' mission was singular in saving the inner man. These believe that Jesus remained aloof from the chronic social problems plaguing society. This aloofness, they believe, was deliberate because Jesus did not come as a social reformer, but as man's redeemer. He was, according to this position, exclusively a physician of souls. This position is too narrow for the width and depth of the love of God as revealed in the Bible.

B. Man is both religious and social

While it is certainly true that Jesus' main efforts were directed at saving souls, it should be remembered that man is a social being as well as religious. These two aspects of man's life cannot be so radically separated. How can one neatly isolate the problems of the inner man from the problems of society when social problems affect him emotionally and spiritually? Man must spiritually survive in the midst of the ills society is constantly forcing upon him.

1. The Gospel speaks of Jesus' interest in daily affairs.

Even a cursory study of the Gospels will reveal that Jesus was very deeply involved in the private problems of the family unit. Nothing can be gleaned from a study of Jesus' life to support a monastic withdrawal from the social ills of the world.

Daily problems cannot be divorced from their sources. Some of the most crucial problems in our community have as their

sources dishonesty, hypocrisy, covetousness, adultery, fornication and all types of uncleanness. At the beginning of his mission, Jesus proclaimed the arrival of a new era, *the kingdom of heaven was at hand.* All social sins had to be put away as such would prevent one from entering the new order. The sermon on the mount is a classic rebuke of vices which contribute heavily to the problems of daily social living.

Furthermore, Jesus was overwhelmed by the pain people bore from chafing under the burdens of social ills. It is beyond our comprehension that the Messiah of promise would not be concerned with the lame, the blind, the leper, and the poverty stricken. Jesus told the devil that man was not to live by bread alone,[1] *but he was not implying that man needed no bread at all.*

Jesus' exemplary prayer for the disciples teaches that it is proper to pray for daily bread.[2] *"Wherefore, if God so clothe the grass of the field, which today is, and tomorrow is cast into the oven, shall he not much more clothe you, O ye of little faith?"*[3] Then Matthew adds, *"Your heavenly father knoweth that ye have need of these things."*[4]

Not a trace can be found in the Gospels for Jesus' aloofness from society. There is no such clear distinction made between his concerns for the spiritual and material needs. Jesus is Lord over all of life. *No where does his authority stop.* Christianity permeates the whole of man's existence.

But if alienating the social affairs of man from the concerns of Christianity is foreign to the heart of God, the opposing view that would make Jesus basically a "banner carrying reformist" of community grievances is equally out of the question. There are those who cry that if we ever expect to convert the world to Christianity, we must begin with improving social conditions. Not until then, these social gospel advocates say, will the preaching of the Gospel be effective. Attack first illiteracy and poverty, and then ears will be turned to the message of Christianity.

The social gospel has great appeal among reformers. The problem is, Jesus did not present salvation of the human race from this point of view. Jesus struck directly at the heart, the source of all evils. Jesus' method of approach was: *change the heart of man, then he will change his external conditions.*[5]

We have presented earlier how in the wilderness of temptation Satan tried to get Jesus to take the avenue of shortcuts. "Feed the body first," was Satan's error.[6] Eventually Jesus became the greatest reformer the world has ever known, but he offered no quick remedies. Ingrained slavery was one issue at hand. Jesus' wisdom caused him to seek first of all the heart of man. The agonizing problems of the human race were far too deeply ingrained to be eliminated merely by getting the government to supply more housing and food for the needy.

More reforms have come about through the years because Jesus appealed first to man's heart with the power of the word of God's love. This is not to say that there was no social appeal in Jesus' preaching, but simply elevating social conditions for man was not the fulcrum upon which he worked. Jesus' power for reform lay in the inspiration of God. He led no protest marches in Jerusalem, or headed no community board for disease control, or improvement of local sanitation as badly as these things were needed. Jesus was afire with the zeal of God's house with a message that kindled the spirits of listeners to live for God. This eventually caused them to speak against the cruelty of the immature sport of gladiator games, the suppression of women, and racial injustice.

But it was the Spirit of the Word of God that had to be imparted first of all. *"Seek ye first the kingdom of God and his righteousness,"* was the basic lesson taught in Matthew 6:33, after that, *"all these other things will be added unto you."* The objection is made that the church remains too much aloof from the problems of the community.

While this is too often true, there is also the problem of the church forsaking its roll of preaching the converting gospel to become embroiled in local politics. Once the church is reduced to a mere political machine, its influence in the community for good toward all is dead.

Although it prayed for and supported as

much as possible the local officials, the first century church avoided at all costs any alliances with politics. Somewhere between the church remaining aloof from the social evils of the world, and its being preoccupied with them, lays the true course of action. The twelve, no doubt, were accustomed to helping the poor from their treasury bag. Judas' covetousness made him criticize the expensive gift of perfume as a waste when Mary poured it upon Jesus' head and feet. This seemed to affect all the apostles, but Mary's deed was defended by Jesus.[7] One should never feel guilty for placing a gift in the church contribution to preach the gospel, even when there are poor people in the community.[8] As John plainly points out, Judas did not object to the gift for Christ because he had much concern for the poor, but because he loved money so much it pained him to see the expensive ointment just poured out. This reminds older preachers of how many times they have seen support for mission work and gospel meetings sabotaged in business meetings by someone who said the money could be better spent in some better benevolent way. Beware! While this may be sincere, sometimes this may be only a delaying maneuver to keep from spending any money at all and precipitate increase in contributions. A church fulfilling its mission finds its greatest power to accomplish social improvement is realized in its efforts to lift the gospel of Christ first.

C. The home as Jesus viewed it

Being a Hebrew, Jesus inherited a religion and people that honored the home far higher than any other nation on earth. The Jews held family life in high esteem, even though they had often sinned against it severely. What reason lay behind the Jews having such a high regard for family life as compared to the other nations of their world?

1. The Jews' high regard for family life.

In answering this question one cannot disregard the fact that the Old Testament had the highest explanation for family life in the world. In the first few chapters of Genesis we are assured that man was created in the image of God, who created a helpmeet for man because he saw that it was not good for man to dwell alone. This led to the conviction that family life was divinely created.[9]

The family unit was further enhanced in sacredness by the Law's speaking directly to the head of the family in maintaining a God-man relationship. The husband or father was the head of the family and acted as a priestly mediator in all worship functions.[10] The family unit was preserved by strict instructions based upon the Law. While it is true that there were serious sins that affected Jewish family life, their instruction in the Law kept them from drifting as far astray as the family units among the Gentiles.

One of the most cherished thoughts in a Jewish maiden's mind was that perhaps she would be the chosen mother of the coming Messiah. The thought of being so honored by God among her peers must have been an anchoring factor of faith in the Jewish home.

2. Jesus' contributions toward the sanctity of life.

Jesus contributed to the sanctity of family life in at least three basic ways.

(a) *Most of Jesus' life was viewed within the family unit.* Regardless of some who have tried to maintain that Jesus was Mary's

only child, we know that he not only had a devoted foster father and dear mother, *but also had four brothers and a minimum of two sisters in this family.*[11] God not only chose to dwell on earth in a physical body, he desired a beautiful home environment for his earthly visitation.

(b) *Jesus' teaching is filled with analogies of home life.* He does this in a most tenderly beautiful manner in Luke 15. In this chapter is recorded for all generations the parable of the prodigal son—one of the greatest and most frequently quoted parables in the Bible. The Parable of the Prodigal Son, or as it is sometimes called the Forgiving Father, is based upon the intimacy of home life depicting God as a faithful, loving and forgiving father dealing with two problem sons. Jesus spoke comparatively of home and heavenly relationships in an effort to get men of all time to see the closeness our God seeks with all people. He chose the best way possible to do this by using the family unit as a cameo of God's children.

(c) *Jesus elevated the social status of women and children.* When Jesus was born, women were regarded as little more than mere possessions by their husbands. Marriage was usually arranged by the parents. F. W. Mattox says regarding marriage:

> *Divorce became so commonplace that Seneca referred to women who counted their age by the change of their husbands, and Juvenal mentions one woman who married eight husbands in five years. Divorce was resolved upon the slightest pretext, and many separated merely for the love of change.*[12]

The plight of a widow was terrible as she was left to the mercy of relatives and friends for the bare essentials of life. She was generally ignored in business matters. Female infants often had a pitiful future. Infanticide was commonly practiced when babies were unwanted. Generally speaking, little girls were less desired than sons for obvious economical reasons. Infant females were often abandoned in some field. Some searched for these "exposed babies" and made a profitable business, selling them to pagan temples in which they were reared to be temple prostitutes for religious revenue.[13]

No one ever spoke of marriage as a more binding contract than Jesus. The meager security for women was in attempting to maintain their marriage. Without notice they could find themselves on the streets without any means of support. In his teaching on marriage, Jesus denounced the Jews for their hardness against the marriage contract given by God in the beginning. Although Moses had made legal allowances for divorce in the law, Jesus said that *"From the beginning it was not so."*[14]

Other than for fornication (sexual relationship with a person other than with one's spouse), Jesus said that divorce was not to be permitted (Matt. 19:9). Jesus defended female dignity which planted the seeds that have uplifted women to honor and prestige never before enjoyed. Jesus upgraded the plight of little children by teaching only those with childlike qualities would be the recipients of the kingdom of heaven.[15] Jesus was not commending childishness in adults, he was speaking of having childish characteristics like innocence, honesty and faith. These wonderful qualities are rare indeed in adults. We shudder when we think of the pitiful plight of women and female children when Jesus came into the world. No other religious founder has done more to lift the social ranks of these than Jesus and Christianity.

But as much as our Lord respected, loved and sanctified the home, he leaves no doubt in our minds that it was to be placed second in importance to the kingdom of heaven (See Luke 14). Jesus regarded the ushering in of the kingdom of God of greater importance than anything else on earth. A Christian with a pure heart, which helps qualify one for the kingdom, will contribute toward the betterment of everything with which he is affiliated. Precious as the home is, if relatives ever get in the way of discipleship, it must be placed second to discipleship. On one occasion when his family sought to call

him away from his teaching duties, Jesus refused their invitation, explaining that those who heard his word were his true relatives.[16] On another occasion, an individual remarked that he would follow Jesus "*whithersoever he went.*" However, his delayed discipleship was reproved because he placed his family affairs first.[17] Jesus knew that discipleship limited by any excuse could never rise to meet the exacting demands of bringing the kingdom of God into the world. We should not think that Jesus was minimizing the importance of home duties. In the instance of Martha and Mary in Luke 10, our Lord did not rebuke Martha for doing her needed housework, but for insisting that Mary forsake a session on hearing his word.

Jesus was well aware that the high cost of discipleship would divide many homes. Yet, he refused to compromise the terms of perfection of the kingdom. He said, "*I am come to set a man in variance against his father, and the daughter against the mother and the daughter-in-law against her mother-in-law.*"[18] As important as the responsibilities of the home are, it is clearly seen in this statement that discipleship places it second to the mission of the kingdom of God.

THE LORD'S ATTITUDE TOWARD MONEY AND POSSESSIONS

The New Testament declares the love of money to be the root of all evil.[19] This being true, we would naturally expect it to have much to say about the attitude of the disciple toward earthly possessions. Jesus literally sprinkled his ministry with parables instructing the disciple concerning material wealth.

A. The rich farmer

The rich farmer who chose to build larger barns in which to store his increased wealth rather than to help the poor is declared to be a fool.[20] Luke tells of a rich man who lost his soul because he failed to hear the Law when he ignored a beggar who sat daily in his gate.[21] Riches and possessions are mentioned over and over again as snares that hinder one from entering the kingdom of heaven.

B. The widow's mite

Jesus summarized all we have been trying to say when he commended a widow for giving all she had to the temple's treasure.[22]

Although she had given only two small mites, Jesus said this was far more than the abundance of the gifts of the rich because she had given all that she had. The home with love is smiled upon by heaven. The size of the gift is not nearly so important as the percentage of the gift according to one's possessions. In this is the true measure of love. Jesus gave all on the cross. Paul spoke of his gift of life as a libation being poured out upon an altar.[23] Our calling is to take up our cross and follow him.

How impractical one might say. Was Jesus ignoring man's need of the material? Was he so naive as to deny that these were essential to man's very existence on earth? *Jesus never condemned the possession of wealth.* It is only when a man allows his wealth to possess him that it becomes a problem. The only time a man was told to rid himself of all his possessions was when a rich young ruler, after keeping all the commandments, still felt condemned in conscience. "*What lack I yet?*" he asked the Lord.[24]

He felt an emptiness in his religion even though he had kept the stringent moral rules of the Old Testament Law. The thing he needed to clear his conscience was a full fellowship of Christ which in his case was prohibited by his great possessions. He simply could not leave his worldly goods for the discipleship of Jesus. All people are not alike in heart. Some may have one thing that prevents them from discipleship, while others have something else. Whether it is wealth,

politics, family life or just being single, whatever obstacle that lies between a person and Jesus must be removed for citizenship in the kingdom of heaven. Pray for bread that you may help the poor and it will be given for both you and them. Pray for wealth that you may use it to increase the borders of the kingdom and it will be given. James says, "*Ye ask, and receive not, because ye ask amiss, that ye may consume it upon your lusts.*"[25] The rich young ruler who had kept all the commandments since his youth is an example given to demonstrate that keeping moral rules alone will not guarantee entrance into the kingdom.

Keeping all the commandments of the law is not equal to loving Jesus more than anything else in the world. Love, not law, is the measuring device. Jesus said, "*So likewise ye, when ye shall have done all those things which are commanded you, say, We are unprofitable servants: we have done that which was our duty to do.*"[26]

C. The Lord never condemned the possession of wealth

It is evident that the Lord accepted the discipleship of several wealthy people. Among those were Joseph of Arimathea,[27] Nicodemus,[28] a centurion of Capernaum[29] and possibly others.[30] It is certain that there were wealthy members of the Lord's church because Paul instructed them on the proper use of their money.[31] Abraham, one of the richest men of faith, became known as the "friend of God" and father of the faithful. He appears in paradise with the saved in Luke 16:19ff, yet another rich man in the same story is lost.

Lazarus, the poor man in this account, was not in paradise because he was poor but because *he had heard the prophets*. Also, the rich man was not in Hades because he was wealthy, but because *he had not heard Moses and the prophets.*[32] Disregard for the sufferings of fellowmen when one has been blessed with abundance brings divine disapproval. Such sin lies in the failure to feel and show pity to those in need. It may be said that all the wealth of Christians could not remove all the poverty in the world, but this is not the point in view. The point in the story of the rich man and Lazarus is that the rich man failed *on a one-to-one basis* when a specific need existed right at his front gate. It was an instance where indifference had blinded one to someone suffering right before his eyes to whom he could have easily extended mercy.

No child of the kingdom can remain aloof from the sufferings of the world while ignoring specific sufferings before him which he can easily eliminate. This does not mean that one should support the con game of every panhandling deadbeat seeking a free ride on society. This would only be aiding a church chiselling hustler's dishonesty. *These seek to hold the Christian's tender conscience hostage for a free ride.* Paul admonishes, "*As we therefore have opportunity, let us do good unto all men, especially unto them who are of the household of faith.*"[33] But helping one to loaf free on society is not doing good. Paul commanded the church at Thessalonica, "*If any would not work, neither should he eat*" (II Thess. 3:10).

This is not to say that every person who calls you on the telephone or knocks at your door is a professional beggar. Jesus was poor himself. He had no earthly dwelling place, no savings account or always sufficient money to pay the temple tax (Matt. 17:27).

At death, his sole possession worth anything was a seamless robe for which the soldiers gambled.[34] He was buried in a borrowed

Want to restore New Testament Christianity? Then, "speak where the Bible speaks and remain silent where the Bible is silent; call Bible things by Bible names and do Bible things the Bible way" (See I Peter 4:11).

tomb.[35] Yet the world belonged to Jesus in a very special way as it does to all meek souls. How foolish it was for Satan to offer Jesus the world in return for devil worship. When one bows to Satan, the truly beautiful things on earth disappear from his sight.

D. Jesus and prayer life

The disciples could see the pronounced effect of prayer on the life of Jesus. These staunch Jewish men had been raised in strict teaching of the Jewish faith. They had been taught to pray from the time they were babies, yet, in Luke 11:1, they asked Jesus to teach them how to pray.

One can but wonder about this. They must have observed Jesus' prayer life doing something for him that they had not experienced for themselves, even though they had prayed throughout their lives. They had observed prayer after prayer at the Temple and synagogue, but in Jesus they recognized a difference.

Could it be possible that this could be the same experience of ours? Could we have been praying all of our lives and yet feel sure there is something missing which can be observed in faithful saints around us? Jesus gave a guide to prayer in Matthew 6. It can be seen in this prayer that Jesus was concerned about social conditions about him. "*Give us this day our daily bread,*" are his instructions in prayer. What could declare the care and concern of Jesus for our social welfare any more than this? He states plainly that "*your heavenly Father knoweth that ye have need of all these things.*"[37]

Man is totally the creation of God. Consequently, God is interested in the total man. Who would attempt to point out that here or there God's interest in the total man ceases. The writer of Hebrews spoke of God's interest in the total man when he affirmed that God's word is "*quick (living), and powerful, and sharper than any two edged sword, piercing even to the dividing asunder of soul and spirit, and the joints and marrow, and is a discerner of the thoughts and intents of the heart*" (Heb. 4:12).

Fran E. Graef beautifully expresses the point in this hymn:

Does Jesus care when my heart is pained
Too deeply for mirth and song;
As the burdens press, and the cares distress,
And the way grows weary and long?
Oh Yes he cares, I know he cares
His heart is touched with my grief;
When the days are weary, the long
nights dreary,
I know my Saviour cares.

LUKE 12:13-23 And one of the company said unto him, Master, speak to my brother, that he divide the inheritance with me. And he said unto him, Man, who made me a judge or a divider over you? And he said unto them, Take heed, and beware of covetousness: for a man's life consisteth not in the abundance of the things which he possesseth. And he spake a parable unto them, saying, The ground of a certain rich man brought forth plentifully: And he thought within himself, saying, What shall I do, because I have no room where to bestow my fruits? And he said, This will I do: I will pull down my barns, and build greater; and there will I bestow all my fruits and my goods. And I will say to my soul, Soul, thou hast much goods laid up for many years; take thine ease, eat, drink, and be merry. But God said unto him, Thou fool, this night thy soul shall be required of thee: then whose shall those things be, which thou hast provided? So is he that layeth up treasure for himself, and is not rich toward God. And he said unto his disciples, Therefore I say unto you, Take no thought for your life, what ye shall eat; neither for the body, what ye shall put on. The life is more than meat, and the body is more than raiment.

References

1. Matthew 4:4
2. Matthew 6:11
3. Matthew 6:30
4. Matthew 6:32
5. Matthew 15:19-20
6. Matthew 4:1ff.
7. John 12:2-8; Matthew 26:6-13
8. John 12:8
9. Genesis 1:26; 2:18
10. Deuteronomy 16:11
11. Mark 6:3-4
12. F. W. Mattox, *The Eternal Kingdom* (Delight, Ark.: Gospel Light Publishing Co., 1961) p. 2, 22, 23.
13. *Ibid.*
14. Matthew 19:1ff.
15. Mark 10:14
16. Matthew 12:46ff.
17. Luke 9:57ff., 14:12-38
18. *Ibid.*
19. I Timothy 6:10
20. Luke 12:16ff.
21. Luke 16:19ff.
22 Mark 12:4
23. I Thessalonians 2:17
24. Matthew 19:20
25. James 4:3
26. Luke 17:10
27. Matthew 27:57
28. John 3:1
29. Luke 7:2-9
30. Luke 8:3
31. I Timothy 6:17-19
32. Luke 16:29
33. Galatians 6:10
34. Matthew 27:35
35. Matthew 27:59

Supplementary Readings

Gift, Joseph L. *Life and Customs in Jesus' Times. Cincinnati, Ohio.,* The Standard Publishing Foundation, 1957

Skeel, C. A. J. *Travel in the First Century.* Cambridge: University Press, 1901

Tucker, T. G. *Life in the Roman World of Nero and St. Paul.* New York: The Macmillan Company, 1924

Questions for Chapter Sixteen

1. What is a doctrine of deism concerning God's concern for man?
2. What two aspects of human life cannot be radically separated?
3. In what way does the exemplary prayer of Jesus for the disciples teach social concern?
4. Are there distinctions found in the gospels between the social and spiritual needs of man in God's care for the human race?
5. What emphasis did Satan make in the wilderness temptation concerning social needs?
6. What was Jesus' response?
7. What was the apostles' response to social needs in the church in Acts 6:2ff?
8. Where lies the true course of action for the church in social concerns?
9. How was the family unit enhanced under the Law?
10. Discuss three personal contributions of Jesus toward the sanctity of life.
11. Upon what grounds does Jesus permit divorce?
12. Whom did Jesus say was his true family?

Outline for Chapter Seventeen

The Great I Am

I. John's Emphasis of Jesus' Supremacy
   A. The Great I Am
   B. "I am the bread of life"
   C. "I am the light of the world"
   D. "Before Abraham was, I am"
   E. "I am the door" . . . "I am the good shepherd"
   F. "I am the resurrection and the life"
      1. The limited faith of Martha and Mary
      2. Jesus' power is omnipresent
   G. "I am the way, the truth, and the life"
   H. "I am the true vine"

—READ THIS—

EXODUS 3:14 *And God said unto Moses, I AM that I AM: and he said, Thus shalt thou say unto the children of Israel, I AM hath sent me unto you.*

JOHN 6:48 *I AM that bread of life.*

JOHN 5:43 *I AM come in my father's name, and ye receive me not: if another shall come in his own name, him ye will receive.*

JOHN 6:35 *And Jesus said unto them, I AM the bread of life: he that cometh to me shall never hunger; and he that believeth on me shall never thirst.*

JOHN 7:28 *Then cried Jesus in the temple as he taught, saying, Ye both know me, and ye know whence I AM: and I AM not come of myself, but he that sent me is true, whom ye know not.*

JOHN 7:29 *But I know him: for I AM from him, and he hath sent me.*

JOHN 8:12 *Then spake Jesus again unto them, saying, I AM the light of the world: he that followeth me shall not walk in darkness, but shall have the light of life.*

JOHN 8:23 *And he said unto them, Ye are from beneath; I AM from above: ye are of this world; I AM not of this world.*

JOHN 9:9 *Some said, This is he: others said, He is like him: but he said, I AM he.*

JOHN 10:7 *Then said Jesus unto them again, Verily, I say unto you, I AM the door of the sheep.*

JOHN 10:11 *I AM the good shepherd: the good shepherd giveth his life for the sheep.*

JOHN 10:36 *Say ye of him, whom the father hath sanctified, and sent into the world, Thou blasphemest; because I said, I AM the Son of God?*

JOHN 11:25 *Jesus said unto her, I AM the resurrection, and the life: he that believeth in me, though he were dead, yet shall he live.*

JOHN 14:6 *Jesus saith unto him, I AM the way, the truth, and the life: no man cometh unto the father, but by me.*

JOHN 8:58 *Jesus said unto them, Verily, verily, I say unto you, Before Abraham was, I AM.*

Chapter Seventeen

THE GREAT I AM

Ex. 3:14; Jno. 6:35; 8:12; 8:58; 10:7; 10:11; 11:25; 14:6; 15:1

Here all who suffered sword or flame,
For truth, or Jesus' lovely name,
Shout vict'ry now and hail the lamb,
And bow before the great I Am!
—John Skene

1. JOHN'S EMPHASIS OF JESUS' SUPREMACY

The Synoptics differ from the Gospel of John in many ways. One difference is in the way they lead the reader toward the discovery of Jesus' deity by his disciples. The Synoptics record some early confessions of Jesus' messiahship and special relationship with God, but later depict attitudes towards Jesus that indicate their early confessions fell far short of a belief that Jesus was utterly Divine. This is quite obvious when one observes Peter, Martha and some other disciples, after having confessed Jesus as Christ, later presume to reprove and correct his instruction. Their imperfect faith limits his power to his physical presence.[1]

Had they understood him to be the great I Am of the burning bush, they would have never questioned his wisdom. The Synoptics lead the reader through a series of signs and messages during the ministry of Jesus calculated to bring the reader to a gradual discovery of Jesus as the Christ. Quite differently, John abruptly declares in his prologue that Jesus is the Word, and that he is the God of creation. The church fathers were wise in placing John's Gospel last when they arranged the Gospels in book form. The first three Books give pyramidical evidence that helps one to eventually reach a conclusion that Jesus is Christ. But the curtain rises in John's Gospel with an abrupt startling announcement that Jesus is the Word, the eternal God. After his initial bold proclamation that Jesus is incarnate God, John proceeds with methodical testimony and evidence, proving Jesus to be the eternal great I Am.

John's Gospel is filled with many of Jesus' claims to be the I AM. "I Am" expressions are found no less than fourteen times in John's Gospel. These expressions are direct claims of Jesus' eternal existence and serve to demonstrate his redemptive role in history.

A. The great "I AM" (Ex. 3:14)

Moses sought divine credentials to convince the children of Israel that he had been sent of God. "*Behold, when I come to the children of Israel, and shall say unto them, The God of your fathers hath sent me unto you; and they shall say to me, What is his name? What shall I say unto them? And God said unto Moses, 'I AM THAT I AM.*' In this passage, God declared himself to be the God of their Jewish ancestors—Abraham, Isaac and Jacob. This is a plain declaration of life beyond death because he speaks of these men as being alive, yet they had been physically dead for centuries.

Jesus used the above reference to reprove the Sadducees who ridiculed the resurrection of the dead.[2] Man's spirit is from God and is immortal. God is life and rules eternally over living souls, not the nonexistent dead. Concerning the relevance of this life to the one after death, Jesus said, "*Fear not them which kill the body, but are not able to kill the soul: but rather fear him which is able to destroy both soul and body in hell.*"[3] All souls who have ever lived will return to the source of eternal life to give an account.[4] Obstinate monarch's like Pharaohs and emperors like Nero are all included.

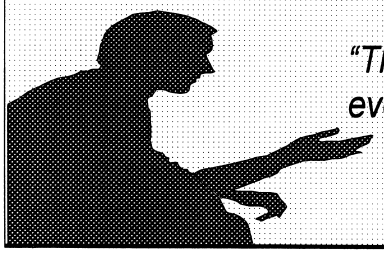
The "I AM" identity of God declares his eternal sovereignty. John's prologue affirms that the Word of Life was in the beginning. He was the Word, and the Word was God who made all things. The remainder of the Gospel is mostly commentary on the first eighteen verses. In it are repeated lessons that demonstrate Jesus, the eternal Spirit of God, is far superior to Moses and the law.

Jesus is presented as not only greater than Moses, but to all other Old Testament prophets. John's Gospel depicts John the Baptist not only denying that he is the Messiah but announcing his mission to be only that prophetic "voice" which was to herald the coming Messiah.[5] He also avows Jesus' word to be superior to both the Samaritan Pentateuch and the Law.[6] All prophets had received the law by measure, but John proclaims that God had not so limited Jesus.[7]

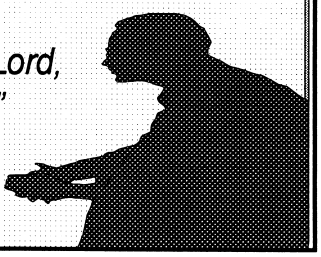
John further declares the superiority of Jesus over Moses and the law by speaking of his Sonship. John records Jesus referring to God as his father. This brought swift condemnation from the Jews who said he made himself equal with God.[8] John was saying the divine and eternal claims of Jesus were so obvious, even his enemies caught the import of his message. Jesus avowed his eternal Father had power over death and that he had placed this power in his hands.[9] Thus, the key to sharing the hope of the resurrection and eternal life is in *hearing him.*[10]

***"And Moses said unto God, Behold, when I come unto the children of Israel, and shall say unto them, The God of your fathers hath sent me unto you; and they shall say to me, What is his name? what shall I say unto them? And God said unto Moses, I AM THAT I AM: and he said, Thus shalt thou say unto the children of Israel, I AM hath sent me unto you"* (Exodus 3:13-14).**

"I am the living bread which came down from heaven: if any man eat of this bread, he shall live forever; and the bread that I give is my flesh, which I will give for the life of the world." John 6:51



"Then said they unto him, Lord, evermore give us this bread." John 6:34



John records Jesus saying, "*I am come in my father's name . . .*"[11] Bear in mind that this name is the same authority that spoke to Moses from the burning bush, saying, "I AM THAT I AM." In chapter six of John, there is the first of several occasions where Jesus uses the expression "I Am" in lessons concerning his divine identity.

B. "I am the bread of life" (John 6:35)

Jesus' miracles had attracted large crowds that followed him about.[12] The disciples were concerned about feeding such multitudes but Jesus was undisturbed by it. He viewed their physical hunger as an excellent opportunity to demonstrate his divine power and to call attention to himself as the bread of life. He did this by giving them a demonstration of his eternal power over material substance.

Jesus' objective was this: if he could feed the multitude material bread by divine power, then by that same power he could feed them the bread of life—his word. For many, Jesus only succeeded in making them marvel over the miracle of food he performed; and while they appreciated the free lunch, they were not about to forsake their synagogue teaching that Moses was the greatest prophet ever to be. Jesus rebuked the multitude for following him only for the food "that perishes" rather than for the food that "endureth unto everlasting life." They rejected Jesus' miracle of bread as being out of league with Moses. They said Moses "gave them bread from heaven to eat."

Jesus replied that Moses had not supplied them with the bread of life, for all who ate of that bread had perished. Rather, he said, he was the true bread of life and if they ate this bread they would never perish. Upon hearing this, some asked for the true bread of heaven, not fully realizing what they were asking for. To this, Jesus plainly declared: "*I am the bread of life: he that cometh to me shall never hunger; and he that believeth on me shall never thirst.*"[13] The Jews murmured at this. Their hypocrisy was evident when they accepted Jesus' miraculous material blessings, but rejected his spiritual message of Sonship which was confirmed by that miracle.

They simply would not give up their old traditional misconceptions of the law. A similar response is often given to evangelistic efforts today, e.g. when one invites a friend over for an evening meal with a view to sharing the message of Jesus, the response heard is often like this: "*I appreciate very much the fine supper, and I know that what you are saying is true, but I just can't make any changes now.*" Jesus told these Jews if they continued to eat the same bread given their ancestors in the wilderness, they would die just as their forefathers before them. Once again he repeated: "*I am the living bread which came down from heaven: if any man eat of this bread, he shall live forever.*" Finally, Jesus could make it no plainer. He said to them in John 8:24: "*Except ye believe I AM WHO I AM, ye shall die in your sins.*" *(Wm. Barclay translation)*

But because of their unwillingness to accept the signs which Jesus performed as greater than those of Moses, the spiritual import of his vital message was blocked out. Many of Jesus' disciples also said it was hard for them to receive it. To these weaker disciples Jesus replied, "*Doth this offend you. What and if ye shall see the Son of Man ascent up where he was before?*"[14] Our Lord was telling them that his first advent from heaven would be followed by a return trip—if they found the first unbelievable, what would they say when they witnessed his return. This is a direct reference to his ascension. The great I AM is the bread of life from heaven. This life, he affirms, will return to the eternal realms. The essence of this bread is life, and to eat it is to be nurtured unto eternal life. Those who hear Jesus' word will have their spirits regenerated to live forever with him who is eternal.

C. "I am the light of the world" (John 8:12)

John had already mentioned in his prologue that Jesus was the light of men. "*Let there be light,*" was the first command of God on earth to be spoken in the creation. From the beginning, the Word of God revealed the knowledge of truth and dispelled the darkness of ignorance.

The source of this light was the everlasting Spirit of life which the writer of Hebrews declared to be the very essence of Jesus' being (Heb. 1:3). John says this Word is God. Hearing this word is to walk in the light (Jno. 1:1-5; I Jno. 1:7).

Believing the word generates the light of eternal life in the soul. In his record, John states: "***I am** the light of the world.*" Jesus was not merely the light for the Jewish nation. Just as the spoken word brought light to the dark world at creation, just so, spiritual darkness can be dispelled in all nations when it is spoken again in this new spiritual age. The great I AM is the eternal Word of truth (Jesus), illuminating all hearts that love the truth regardless of national boundaries.

If one is a child of the light, he is by virtue of his sonship an heir of light. John says, "*If we walk in the light, as he is in the light, we have fellowship, one with another, and the blood of Jesus Christ his Son cleanseth us from all sin.*"[15] That light which blazed before Moses at the burning bush in 1500 B.C. spoke deliverance for the children of Israel. That light of deliverance was also signified by the eternal flame of the lampstand in the tabernacle. The True light now burns in the believer's heart, the spiritual temple of the new spiritual age. It sheds its light throughout the world wherever the word of truth is lived and taught (I Cor. 6:19).

D. "Before Abraham was, I am" (John 8:58)

The discourse between Jesus and the Jews on the occasion of our text concerned genealogy and pedigree. The point Jesus was emphasizing is this—fleshly pedigree means absolutely nothing when seeking salvation. Jesus said that he was sent from his father and that he always did his father's will. This was evidence of his being God's son. He summed it up this way: "*Whosoever has seen me has seen the father*"[16] He also stated that his were the words of truth and, if believed, these words would set them free.

Jesus was proclaiming his right of heirship to set them free from the slavery of sin. "*If the son therefore shall make you free, ye shall be free indeed.*"[17] Their minds were closed to the spiritual import of Jesus' message, therefore they declared they were the children of Abraham and had never been in bondage. What boasting! They indeed had been in bondage since 586 B.C., except for a short period under the Maccabbees, and even at this moment they were subjugated by Rome. Jesus ignored their proud rhetoric and kept on emphasizing that they were the slaves of sin. At that very moment they would have preferred him dead— their own saviour promised by Moses' Law. He knew devilish murder was in their hearts, yet they claimed to be children of Abraham. On the

principle that children receive character traits from their father, Jesus accused them of not being truly Abraham's seed, for Abraham never plotted to kill anyone who spoke the truth. The devil, however, has done such things from the beginning, and in their plot to kill him, they were setting themselves against truth. This was contrary to their claim of being the children of Abraham. Quite the contrary, it placed them in league with the devil.

Jesus admonished them, saying that unless they changed their spiritual parentage from the father of lies and murder, they would certainly reap the destiny of their spiritual father—*eternal death.* If, however, they would believe him, they would become heirs of life. Jesus added later, "*I AM the way, the truth, and the life. No man cometh unto the father, but by me.*"[18] Jesus had earlier said, "*If a man keep my saying, he shall never see death.*"[19] The message was plain enough. Remain in the family of the father of lies and you will reap an inheritance of eternal destruction; but believe the Son, the Word of Truth, and you will become a part of the family of God and inherit eternal life.

But they had trouble understanding Jesus. They continually tried to limit him to the *literal meaning of his words,* rather than allow him to speak with spiritual meaning. Jesus said this was their problem. They would not let him speak in terms of spiritual bread in chapter 6, and in chapter 8 they could not understand his spiritual teaching about bondage, sonship and heirship. *They just could not comprehend spiritual language.* Such talk by Jesus seemed absurd, so they scorned him, avowing that Abraham and all the prophets were dead.

How could Jesus not expect to die if all the Old Testament worthies were dead? Jesus shocked them with this reply, "*Abraham rejoiced to see my day: And he saw it, and was glad.*"[20] "Seeing Jesus' day" meant that Abraham believed God's word was still valid after death. Even had Isaac died, Abraham knew God would bring him back to fulfill his promise to bless all through his seed. Death would not offset God's word. As the incarnate word, Jesus was saying that when they killed him, it would not thwart God's promises in him because his Word was eternal.

The promise of God to bless all nations was through Isaac. Abraham recognized this and received God's command to slay him in faithful obedience, knowing God would raise Isaac from the dead. In this Abraham's faith was made perfect, *being justified by faith in the resurrection.* To Abraham, God was the Great I Am who lives eternally, and against whom death poses no threat. *Truly, in this, Abraham saw the resurrection day of Jesus.*

But these Jews were blind to "his day." They could not be Abraham's children because, if they were, they would share his legacy of faith in the resurrection of the dead. Jesus would soon demonstrate the power of his word by resurrecting Lazarus from the dead. The Jews admitted the miracle, but only hardened themselves to murder Jesus.

The really upsetting thing to the Jews in John 8 came when Jesus declared himself to be the I Am that preexisted Abraham. This was a direct claim of deity. To these Jews, this was preposterous. However, John, by using the nominative predicate "I Am" (the Old Testament expression that identified God in Exodus 3:14), wants his readers to see that this is exactly what Jesus was saying. John's readers are to see that Jesus is the manifestation of divine eternal truth which all believers in God have believed in their respective generations. To believe the truth of God in one generation (like Abraham's), means that an individual possessing the same love for divine truth living in any other generation would also believe it. *The same thing holds true about its rejection,* which these Jews were fulfilling.

Understanding this, we know why Paul said of the Israelites in the wilderness: they "*did all eat the same spiritual meat; And did all drink the same spiritual drink: for they drank of the spiritual Rock that followed them: and that Rock was Christ.*"[21] As Christ is the truth and power of God which was before all things, then Jesus lived before Abraham. Consequently, Jesus could say, "*Before Abraham was, I AM.*"

E. "I am the door . . . I am the good shepherd" (John 10:9-11)

Jesus is declaring in the two "I AM's" above that he is the sole entrance into the fold of God. In him alone lies the universal power to bring all nations to God. Those who ignore his word are declared to be thieves, that is, they steal the sheep from the true shepherd by perverting the truth.

However, the false prophet can be detected, he says, because he will flee as a hireling when the sheep are in danger. Their plotting to kill Jesus meant they were the thieves and hirelings who sought to steal the sheep away from their true Shepherd. As a thief has no feelings for his stolen property, except for personal gain, so these opponents of Jesus cared not for the sheep of God. Jesus would oppose these thieves with truth to his death. The blood atonement could then be offered for all who believed in his authority. This truth was sealed by his resurrection. All true sheep recognize his words as the true word of God (Jno. 10:1ff.).

The great I AM is the perpetual door to God's sheepfold and safety. He is the provider and sustainer of those who hear his voice, both Jew or Gentile. Jesus speaks of this universality in John 10:16: "*Other sheep* (Gentiles) *I have which are not of this fold* (Jewish), *them also I must bring, and they shall hear my voice; and there shall be one fold, and one shepherd.*" [parenthetical identifications, FDN] This passage is not an endorsement of denominational groups. It is a statement which includes those of all nations who obey the truth and become members of Christ's body (Eph. 4:4-5; I Cor. 12:13). The great I Am is the one perpetual portal of truth through which all in every nation must pass. As the Good Shepherd, he is the provider and protector of his sheep in every age.

F. "I am the resurrection and the life" (John 11:25)

In the above caption, John records Jesus' ultimate frankness in revealing his divine identity and power. Once again this statement demands a moral decision by the reader. It leaves no middle ground, either Jesus is the Son of God, or he was mentally incompetent. The above caption was made to Martha, a close friend whom Jesus loved dearly. Martha was the sister of Mary. Lazarus, their brother, is dead at the time this is spoken. This family was among his dearest friends whose home Jesus frequently visited.

In chapter 11, John carefully unfolds in order the details leading up to the message on Christ's resurrection. Due to his frequent visits in their home, Mary and Martha thought they knew Jesus' doctrine very well, but Jesus knew their faith needed perfecting. They needed to believe in his power over death. They believed he was Christ, but did not know he had the key to unlock the grave. This is a serious imperfection in their faith which Jesus desired to correct by resurrecting Lazarus. Jesus declared this to be the purpose of the miracle in these words: ". . . *to the intent ye may believe.*" [22] This family was among the best of the Jewish disciples, but they also represent the limited faith of each of them. All needed their faith perfected in Jesus' omnipotent power.

The narrative of this faith-building exercise begins with Jesus receiving news of Lazarus' illness while he is a couple of days journey away to the north (perhaps in Perea). On receiving the urgent message to come, Jesus delays his trip to Bethany, *obviously waiting for Lazarus to die.* This is not cruel, it is a critical lesson declaring his full identity. The words of Thomas reflect a general lack of faith among them when he said, "*Let us also go, that we may die with him.*"[23]

1. The limited faith of Martha and Mary (Jno. 11).

Upon his arrival at Bethany, the ensuing conversation reveals that none of those present believe in Jesus' omnipotent power. Martha says she believes in a future resurrection, but now that Lazarus is dead, she has no hope that anything can be done by Jesus to restore his life. "*If thou hadst been here,*" Martha laments, "*my brother had not died.*" Even her faith in Jesus as the Messiah was not sufficient to believe he could do anything once a person was dead.

After Jesus' conversation with Martha, Mary arrives on the scene. Her faith is no greater than Martha's. She repeats the same words of her sister; "*Lord, if thou hadst been here, my brother had not died.*" Mary also thought nothing now could be done, even by Jesus. The tender situation, his grief at their grief caused by a lack of faith in himself, caused Jesus to groan within himself. In John11: 37, John recorded the disbelief of the Jews who came to comfort the family. Notice that they spoke in the past tense regarding Jesus' ability and power: "*Could not this man, which opened the eyes of the blind, have caused that even this man should not have died?*" Even though Martha said the following words to Jesus after Lazarus' death: "*But I know that even now, whatever thou wilt ask of God, God will give it thee,*" she was excluding any possibility of resurrecting her brother. This becomes evident when she strongly objects to Jesus' request to remove the stone from before the grave, saying: "*Lord, by this time he stinketh: for he has been dead four days.*" All this is to lead the reader to the greatest demonstration of Jesus' identity heretofore: *that he is God incarnate with the keys of life and death in his hands.*

Lazarus' death, Jesus said, was for the glory of God. The glorification of God would be in witnessing God's power in Jesus being triumphant over death. This was to bolster their faith and prepare all for his own death in a matter of days at Jerusalem. What a powerful way to fortify the disciples against the crucifixion. Regardless, they still were not entirely established in "resurrection faith," after this, for after Jesus died, they prepared his body for burial just as they would have done any other dead body. His resurrection came as a complete surprise to them (Lu. 24:4ff.).

2. Jesus' power is omnipresent.

One cannot help but remember the great faith of the centurion who believed that Jesus could heal his servant without being physically present. His confession of faith amazed Jesus because it came from a Gentile who believed in the *omnipresent* power of his word to heal, which the Jews did not.[24]

Jesus said that he had not found such great faith in all Israel. There is no indication that the centurion's faith included the resurrection from the dead as his servant had not died, but it does demonstrate a faith beyond that of Martha's and Mary's because their faith limited Jesus' power to his *physical presence.*

Herein is a great lesson for all: *Jesus' physical presence is not essential for his availing power.* Prayer in spirit and truth, when it is according to God's will, is sufficient, even though Jesus is not physically present.

Just as in Gethsemane, often those closest to Jesus still sleep when the Lord needs someone to watch most intently. We must pray constantly with the father of the afflicted child at the foot of the mount of transfiguration: "*Lord I believe, help thou my unbelief.*"[25]

At the tomb of Lazarus, Jesus commanded: "*Take ye away the stone.*" This may be an amazing statement to some readers. If Jesus can raise the dead, why cannot he just command the stone to be cast aside? The lesson is this: *When it is his will, God performs for man what man cannot perform for himself.* God asks faith of us, he provides the power. Their faith, weak as it was, responded positively when they rolled the stone aside. Jesus blessed their act of faith, though no greater than a mustard seed, by raising Lazarus. A faith that will act ever so reluctantly, although it is as small as a tiny mustard seed, can unleash the omnipotent power of God, providing hope after death. Jesus called Lazarus by name at the tomb and he immediately came forth. We know why Jesus called Lazarus by his name. Think what would have happened had he just said "come forth" to the dead. One day the same voice will call for a general resurrection. By the same power that he resurrected Lazarus and only days later, himself, all shall come forth to face the Creator.

The deed was done and the record states that many of the Jews who came believed on him. This enraged the chief priests and the Pharisees even though they admitted a miracle had been performed. One would think the Pharisees would have been pleased at this as they had an avid belief in the resurrection and an ongoing argument with the Sadducees who did not believe in it. This deed could have given them a tremendous edge, but their envy of Jesus at this point is so advanced they are willing to ignore it. Lazarus' resurrection only served to sign the death warrant of Jesus. There had been talk about his death prior to this time, but it is "*from that day forth they took counsel together for to put him to death.*"[26] Their attempt to rid themselves of Jesus began in earnest from this moment.

G. "I am the way, the truth, and the life" (John 14:6)

The above caption is Jesus' response to Thomas who did not understand what Jesus was talking about when he said he would go away and that the disciples would later follow him. Confessing his ignorance, Thomas asked where Jesus would go, and the way to his abode.

Thomas was the very last to believe in the resurrection of Jesus. He may have wavered a bit in faith after Calvary, for he was absent at least once at the post-resurrectional meetings of the disciples and refused to believe their testimony that Jesus had been resurrected. Their testimony was enough, however, to cause him to be determined to be present eight days later upon the next first day of the week.[27]

It was at this meeting that he, the last of the eleven, became convinced of Jesus' resurrection. It was here for the first time that it really dawned upon them the meaning behind Jesus' many references to himself as the "I AM." Their understanding is now made perfect. After the resurrection the full truth of Jesus' identity falls upon them and is reflected in Thomas's perfected confession: "*My Lord and My God.*"

A great note of encouragement is added for all future readers of John's Gospel in that Thomas makes the tremendous discovery that Jesus is not merely a Jewish messiah, but the Lord God from heaven. Jesus' reply was: "*Thomas, because thou has seen me, thou has believed: blessed are they that have not seen, and yet have believed.*" Jesus tenderly rebuked Thomas for not having believed the testimony of the small band of brethren who

had told him the truth. To Thomas, seeing was essential to believing, even though we are to walk by faith and not by sight.

Jesus appeared to Thomas after his resurrection to qualify him as an apostle, not merely to make him a Christian. Jesus tells Thomas that later generations would manifest greater faith than himself, because they would receive the testimony of the Gospel by faith and not by sight.

H. "I am the true vine" (John 15:1ff.)

One thing remained in the final and crucial teaching Jesus desired to leave with the disciples—Christian discipleship is based on relationship with the father through the Son. Many times he has spoken of the unity that existed between himself and the father. He now goes a step further by including them in the illustration of a vine and its branches.

God, the Gardener, had planted the Vine in hope of a good fruitful harvest. Jesus is the true vine that has been planted by God in the world. The vine had grown and produced branches. The disciples are the branches which are expected to bear fruit—*the fruit of the Spirit* (See Gal. 1:22ff.). The divine Gardener is carefully observing and caring for his vineyard. Thus, God will supply every need for the continued and improved good production of fruit, but in the event some branches fail to produce, he will do exactly what any other good gardener would do to protect the vine from blight and unproductive branches: *he will sever them from the vine and burn them.* The relationship is clear. Jesus is the vine from God. Through him flows the spiritual nutrients to produce eternal life. Its purpose is to produce fruit bearing branches. These branches are wholly dependent upon the divine connection to fulfill their purpose. "*Without me, ye can do nothing,*" Jesus reminded them. Disciples, even churches as a whole, can forsake their vital relationship with Jesus (Rev. 2:3). The moment desires turn elsewhere, souls begin to shrivel and die. God will remove these branches in divine judgment.

John has led the disciples (and his readers) to discovery exactly what one must understand when a confession of Jesus is made—*true confession of Jesus' messiahship means confessing his omnipotent deity as the Son of God.*[28] John is now ready to conclude his Gospel.

Notice that Christ and divine Sonship are inseparably linked in the following final confessional statement by John: "*And many other signs truly did Jesus in the presence of his disciples, which are not written in this book: but these are written that ye might believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God; and that believing ye might have life through his name.*"[29]

As the Great I AM once commissioned Moses to preach the Gospel of deliverance to the Israelites in Egypt, Jesus has now commissioned the church to preach the New Testament Gospel of the eternal I AM to the whole world.[30] There is no other power unto salvation.

Why the branches in John 15 represent united believers and can not represent conflicting doctrines of denominations . . .

"And God said, Let the earth bring forth grass, the herb yielding seed, and the fruit tree yielding fruit after his kind, whose seed is in itself, upon the earth: and it was so" (Genesis 1:11).

"The seed is the word of God" (Jesus, Luke 8:11).

Jesus prayed: "that they all may be one" (John 17:21).

References

1. Matthew 18:16, cf., 16:22
2. Mark 12:27
3. Matthew 10:28
4. Revelation 20:12
5. John 1:26ff.
6. John 4:1ff.
7. John 3:34
8. John 5:18
9. Matthew 28:18, John 14:1ff.
10. Matthew 17:5
11. John 5:43
12. John 6:2
13. John 6:35
14. John 6:62
15. Ephesians 1:7
16. John 14:8
17. John 8:36
18. John 14:6, John 8:44
19. John 8:51
20. John 8:56
21. I Corinthians 10:4
22. John 11:15
23. John 11:16
24. Matthew 8:8-13
25. Mark 9:24
26. John 11:53
27. John 20:24ff.
28. See Paul's statement on this in Romans 10:9-10
29. John 20:30-31
30. Matthew 28:18-20; Mark 16:15-16.

Supplementary Readings

Slaughter, Frank G. *The Crown and the Cross.* Cleveland, Ohio: The World Publishing Co., 1959

Questions for Chapter Seventeen

1. How did God tell Moses to identify His deity to Pharaoh?
2. What does "I AM THAT I AM" signify about God?
3. How does John's Gospel depict John the Baptist?
4. Discuss the meaning included in "I AM" in the following verses: John 6:35; 8:12; 10:9ff.; 11:25; 14:6.
5. What does, "Before Abraham was, I am" mean?

Then said Jesus unto his disciples, If any man will come after me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross, and follow me. For whosoever will save his life shall lose it: and whosoever will lose his life for my sake shall find it. For what is a man profited, if he shall gain the whole world, and lose his own soul? or what shall a man give in exchange for his soul?

—Matthew 16:24-26

Outline for Chapter Eighteen

Nearing the Cross

1. Jesus was aware of the cross from the beginning
   A. Jesus had perfect knowledge of the Old Testament
   B. Jesus knew the cruel fate of the Old Testament prophets
   C. Jesus was of sufficient maturity to understand the costs
   D. Jesus filled the parables with references concerning his death
   E. Jesus' death was the discussion topic on the Mount of Transfiguration

II. The Wrath of the Jewish Hierarchy Against Jesus
   A. Jesus was drastically different from all their traditional concepts of the law
   B. Jesus had no impressive credentials
   C. As their name suggests, the Pharisees were separatists
      1. A merit system of salvation
      2. Why Jesus' messianic claims were opposed
         (a) He would not join their party affiliation
         (b) Jesus called disciples that were no more impressive to them than himself.
         (c) Their basic belief concerning righteousness caused the Pharisees to oppose Jesus
         (d) Jesus' belief in the universal Fatherhood of God divided the Pharisees from him.
   D. The Sadducees join the opposition
   E. Jesus lost the crowds

AM STRAITENED TIL
IT IS ACCOMPLISHED.

Chapter Eighteen

Nearing The Cross

John 11:53

There was One who was willing,
To die in my stead,
That a soul so unworthy might live;
And the path to the cross,
He was willing to tread,
All the sins of my life to forgive.
—Grant Colfax Tullar

1. JESUS WAS AWARE OF THE CROSS FROM THE VERY BEGINNING

From the beginning of his public ministry Jesus knew that the rigors of the cross lay at its close. There are at least five reasons for believing he had full awareness of what lay ahead.

A. Jesus had perfect knowledge of the Old Testament

He had been taught the law and the prophets from dedicated Jewish parents from the moment he had sat on his mother's knee. He had heard both the sacred writings and the cherished history of Israel every Sabbath in the synagogue. He knew the scriptures concerning the suffering Messiah. He was, in fact, the incarnate Word. He had to be familiar with the protevangelion in Genesis 3:15. Moses had prophesied that he would bruise the serpent's head but his own heel would be bruised in the process. By the age of twelve, Jesus had mastered the law sufficiently to astonish the doctors of the law at the Temple. By the beginning of his ministry he had divine recall of the sacred literature. He knew well the theme of the suffering Messiah in Isaiah 53.

B. Jesus knew the cruel fate of the Old Testament Prophets

Lamenting over the holy city, Jesus said: "*O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, which killest the prophets, and stonest them that are sent unto thee; how often would I have gathered thy children together, as a hen gathereth her brood under her wings, and he would not.*"[1] Stephen, the first Christian martyr, asked his assailants, "*Which of the prophets have ye not stoned?*"[2] One cannot suppose that Jesus had less knowledge of the prophets' fate than Stephen. He knew what his future held, and he also knew who held the future. Jesus did not stumbled into the cross.

C. Jesus was mature: He understand the cost

He was thirty years old when he was baptized of John.[3] This event seems to mark his final decision to pursue his mission at the cost of his life. He was of sufficient age to understand the costs and made that choice as a mature man. From the very beginning Jesus had a vivid perception of the cross, yet was determined to follow his ministry through to its end. At his baptism there was given to him the approving sign of the Holy Spirit. This came in the form of a dove accompanied by a voice from heaven which declared that his actions were well pleasing to the Father. He was both aware of what lay ahead and fully equipped for the future by the Spirit.

D. Jesus filled the parables with references to his death

Of them all, there is none more plain on this subject than the parable of the householder. In this, Jesus said, "*Hear another parable: There was a certain householder, which planted a vineyard, and hedged it about, and digged a winepress in it, and built a tower, and let it out to husbandmen, and went into a far country; and when the time of the fruit drew near, he sent his servants to the husbandmen, that they might receive the fruits of it. And the husbandmen took the servants, and beat one, and killed another, and stoned another. Again, he took other servants more than the first: and they did unto them likewise. But last of all he sent his son, saying, They will reverence my son. But when the husbandmen saw the son, they said among themselves, This is the heir; come; let us kill him, and let us seize on his inheritance. And they caught him, and cast him out of the vineyard, and they slew him*"[4]

In this parable Jesus refers to himself as the son whom the husbandmen slew. Jesus went with open eyes to the cross. In this parable we understand that he knew well beforehand where his path led.

E. Jesus' death was the topic on the holy mount

He, with Moses and Elias, spoke of his exodus soon to come.[5] We have spoken of this earlier in detail.

II. THE WRATH OF THE JEWISH HIERARCHY

How could experts of the law have missed seeing the mission of Christ being lived out in fulfillment of the law and the prophets? From all outward appearances, the Pharisaic branch of Judaism appeared to be the strongest most dedicated group that rigidly practiced the ceremonies of the law. Let us explore the motives underlying their avid opposition to Jesus and their desire to put him to death.

A. Jesus was unlike all traditional concepts

Proud people find it extremely difficult to admit error. The Pharisees were committed to binding their amplified interpretation of the law.[6] It was unthinkable to them that anyone could challenge their cherished traditional beliefs and remain undefiled Jews.

There are those who champion inherited creeds of men and therefore interpret the Bible with any necessary adjustment to make it conform to their tradition.[7]

The hold of hand-me-down religion is sometimes strong. Regardless of biblical passages that plainly contradict their theological beliefs, some seem to be willing to risk their souls for the religion of their ancestry. If their attention is called to any inconsistency between doctrinal tenets and the Scriptures, as did Luther and other great reformers, it is

summarily dismissed by saying one should not question "official church doctrine," or the seriousness of the issue is minimized by saying it is just a matter of personal interpretation (See II Pet. 1:20).

The Pharisaic belief was based upon their *traditional interpretation* of the law. They had their notions about the nature of the kingdom of God and the Messiah to come. *To them he was ever coming and never coming.*

When he actually came with such utterly different doctrine from their traditional messianic expectations, they rejected him in anger, plotted his death and proceeded to murder him. Their chief problem with Jesus was that he defied their cherished traditions and openly rebuked their hypocrisy.

He never joined any religious party nor sought training in their legal schools. It is always difficult for those who support divisive creeds and religious parties to tolerate anyone who exposes their error.

Consequently, it was extremely easy to find fault with Jesus. Envy is a great motivator for promoting prejudice against anyone who stands in the way; so the Pharisees were willing to use any method to rid themselves of this Man who dared to be different.[8] Let all beware.

When allegiance to a traditional doctrine is stronger than a desire to obey scripture that is plainly contrary to it, one becomes a modern Pharisee.[9]

B. Jesus had no impressive credentials

Jesus was totally unimpressive to the religious elite. He came from obscure ranks and of a lowly background. No uneducated carpenter's son from such a pedestrian village as Nazareth could possibly qualify as the Messiah. Perhaps, if he had been from a priestly family or a more respectable city, *but Nazareth?* Never! Impossible! When searching for a new minister, churches should pay close attention to this. It is sad but often true that the search committees of the more lucrative and popular churches place fleshly appearances and qualifications above the spiritual. Many congregations have built their numbers around the personality of the minister rather than the authority of the scriptures. Other congregations have suffered because their choice was made more from a fleshly criteria in their search for "the right man" for their job.

In reproof of this, some ministers have circulated an article in their church bulletins about a certain minister seeking a local work with a congregation. The article spoke of a preacher who was seeking to preach for a congregation of considerable wealth and size. In his resume he stated he had traveled extensively in his ministry for the Lord, but thought he should tell the committee that he had been expelled from many towns and villages because of his uncompromising preaching. He informed them that he had been mocked and laughed out of a large city by its learned men. He said he had also been stoned and left for dead, arrested and thrown into prison for his frank preaching, and was despised by religious leaders of large denominations. He mentioned he had a physical ailment that often troubled him, but declined to state what it was. He stated further that there was a big movement among highly respected preachers to discredit him. He confessed he was rather weak in speech, but that his teaching was inerrantly sound with the Scriptures. He did not give them a long list of converts he had made, but said he thanked God that he baptized no more than he did at one place.

He offered to support himself in a small business if they would select him to preach for them. He mentioned he was unmarried, never planned to be and was against women being preachers. On review, the committee quickly dismissed his application because it seemed obvious that this man was not "the man for the job." The reader realizes even before completing the article that this is only a brief resume of the apostle Paul. Paul would not have been any more comfortable preaching for this church than they would have been to have him preach for them.

C. As their name suggests, the Pharisees were separatists

"Pharisee" means separate. When a Pharisee saw one they considered a sinner approaching, they quickly passed to the other side of the street. Even a slight brush against him as he passed would be considered a defilement excluding him from worship until after a period of cleansing. The entire nation of Samaritans was considered sinful, consequently the Pharisees refused to journey through their country to and from Galilee. They went completely out of their way, crossing the Jordan twice, to prevent defilement by passing through the country.

They also despised and rejected the publicans. Jesus did not share their beliefs nor aloofness toward the common man. Jesus chose Matthew, a publican (tax collector), to be one of his apostles. He also dined with the publican Zacchaeus of Jericho. Worse still, *Jesus was known to converse publicly with women—even women of questionable character.*[10] Such friendliness caused him to be referred to as the "*friend of sinners*," a very degrading reputation at the time. If Jesus unknowingly visited some churches today, he would still be criticized for socializing with the too unfortunate.

By itself, this fraternization with sinners was enough to discredit Jesus among the Pharisees. According to their standards, no true teacher of Israel—much less the Messiah—would be found among the rabble. To them, Jesus was only a small man attempting to hitch a ride to personal glory on the crest of a present wave of messiah mania.

It would have been much easier for them if Jesus had just allowed their ostracism to drive him into retreat and anonymity. But Jesus chose to take them on in frontal attacks. He exposed their attempts at legal entrapment and bested them constantly in their polemic joustings. No man was able to withstand the wisdom with which he spake.[11]

He attracted the common folks because he championed the cause of the poor and outcast. In spite of tremendous legal opposition, Jesus' popularity gradually spread until he was seen, especially by the Sadducees, as a direct threat to the religious parties and priests. If his following was allowed to grow too large, they felt he could be a serious threat to Judaism as they defined it. By upsetting the status quo with the government, he could pose a grave threat toward their losing cherished concessions they had won through years of pressuring the Roman authorities.[12] Consequently, Jesus must be disposed of for the good of the Jewish people.

The underlying problem of the Pharisees constituted two sins: *a severe case of self righteousness and total amnesia in regard to their own imperfections.* Sadly, they had arrived at a juncture in life which many religionists reach. In the Pharisees' search for righteousness, they had arrived at self righteousness. This is always a pitfall to absolute moralists. These begin not only by loathing sin, but their fellowmen as well who fall victims to sin. In a bold sweeping rebuke of the pharisaical blindness, Jesus spoke a parable of two men who went up to the Temple to worship; one a Pharisee, the other a hated sinful publican.[13]

The entire worship of the Pharisee was dominated with his preoccupation of making comparisons between his spiritual worthiness and the unworthiness of the sinful publican. He dared to thank God for his spiritual superiority over the tax collector even though the publican confessed his sins and was so penitently crushed by them that he could not look upward to God. Jesus explicitly points to the publican who was so consciously afflicted with his own sins that he was completely oblivious to others at worship. In this affliction of soul he smote his breast and asked God for one thing only—to forgive him of his terrible sins. Jesus is telling all that worship is totally unacceptable without a consciousness of sin. Worship is not an exclusive formality for the perfect; it is acceptable only from a confessed sinner. "*They that be whole need not a physician*," Jesus declared, but "*they that be sick.*" (Matt. 9:12).

Worship is a time for a self investigation of one's heart.[14] Modern Pharisees continue to

abuse the worship with exterior investigations. Worship for them is a time for judging others far more than themselves. God always gives them perfect marks in righteousness, while few pass their own examination.

1. A merit system of salvation.

The Pharisee thought righteousness was earned through merit. Jesus taught that no one attained perfect righteousness by self righteousness. Both Jesus and Paul inform us that the only way righteousness can be obtained is by faith.[15] The feeling that one can earn righteousness is always self damning. A self righteous sacrifice to God is a stench before his throne and is deplored by the truly righteous in Christ. Sinners lured into the fold of the saved are rather repelled by the snobbishness of it. True Christians have pity for those who are afflicted with this spiritual malady. Sorry, there will be no exclusive mansion for the religious elite in heaven! The awfulness of this sin is this: *those most afflicted seem not to ever know they are guilty of it.*

The scribes and Pharisees sought to earn their salvation by keeping rules and regulations. We have heard it in today's church by those who would make rules where God has not made. (These range from opponents to plural cups in the communion to you-can't-eat-in-the-church-building.) The Jewish rules were their interpretations of the law contained in their commentaries. They had been taught by the best scribes and lawyers that the tradition of the fathers, the Haggadah and Halakhah (commentaries on the law), were as binding as the law itself. They were an extremely religious people. It is strange that a group among the Jews who sought so avidly to be the holiest of Judaism would be the ringleaders of Jesus' opposition. This seems especially true since Jesus held one of their major doctrines in common with them, *the resurrection of the dead and belief in angels and spirits.*

2. Why Jesus' messianic claims were opposed.

Why is it that they were so strongly opposed to the lowly Galilean? The following things seem to be clearly evident from the scriptures.

They believed Jesus was a false Messiah because many had come and gone.[16] Jesus predicted many more would arise after his time. Jesus was rejected by the Pharisees because they believed he was a lawbreaker, therefore defiled and unworthy of spiritual consideration.

Jesus did not fulfill their preconceptions of the Messiah to come. How did he differ from their expectations?

(a) *He would not join their party affiliation.* It had never occurred to them that the Messiah would not join *their ranks*. Jesus had a lowly background. He was from Nazareth, a "mean city," and he was the son of poor parents. He had no Jerusalem pedigree—no endorsement from the renown rabbis. All of these things were very important to the religious leaders and therefore Jesus was rejected as unqualified, not even remotely so.

(b) *Jesus called disciples no more impressive to them than himself.* Some of the disciples were derided, such as Matthew, for their business affiliations with Rome. They were noted as Galileans, i.e. from the ranks of the "ignorant and unlearned."[17] No respectable Pharisee would have anything to do with such a discipleship! In this aloof and ostracizing attitude of the Pharisees, a principal fault stands out—*utter contempt for those outside their cultural circles.*

(c) *Their basic belief concerning righteousness caused the Pharisees to oppose Jesus.* The Pharisee was so meticulous about keeping the letter of the law that he had numbered the commandments of God. According to his count there were 613.[18] More than half of these consisted of "thou shalt not . . ." These 613 rules were considered the sum of all righteousness. Only a perfect keeping of all these could produce acceptable righteous-

ness. Jesus dared to show that righteousness was by faith without their prescribed works. He also offended them greatly when he demonstrated that faith in God ran deeper among some Gentiles than it did the Jews.[19] Because of this, which added to their injury, Jesus taught that Gentiles would be included in the kingdom of God. A major difference between Jesus and the Jews was belief in a universal non-partial God. The inclusion of the Gentiles with the Jews on equal terms of salvation was an unbearable thought to the Pharisee—*Jesus was a heretic.*

Love is the sole basis for serving God. No one can make a definite list of rules on a service of love. "*After ye have done all that ye are supposed to do, ye are still unprofitable servants*," Jesus said.[20] At no time can one say love has done enough if need still exists. Divine love for us is so limitless that John tersely describes God this way: "*God is love.*"[21] Love is unfathomable in its expansiveness. It must act on occasions of infinite circumstances.

No one has time to consult the rules of a human creed to determine just how love is to be fulfilled. Pathetic controversy has divided Christians over those to whom love can be extended, saying, "Christ's finances are exclusively for brethren." Love cannot be limited just to the baptized. Love is fulfilling a need to any neighbor without regard to race or philosophy of life (Gal. 6:10). If the church cannot come to the aid of a non-Christian financially, the church cannot practice love for the world; *but it is godly to have a holy love for the world* (John 3:16), therefore the church can be godly toward the world with its finances. It can and should practice pure and undefiled religion toward the unbeliever.[22] Love spans the universe because it is based on compassion, not baptismal certificates. "God so loved the world," which, in spite of Jewish prejudice, included the Gentiles as well. Had his love not antedated baptism, there would be no reason for baptism.

Unless Christian love extends itself beyond the church toward a neighbor in need, even in the world, baptism into Christ would mean a diminishing of love. God forbid! Unqualified love toward any friend in need is the most powerful force on earth to draw sinners into Christ. Paul speaks on the benevolent issue of love in this manner: "*As we therefore have opportunity, let us do good unto all men, especially the household of faith.*"[23]

Jesus' argument with the Pharisees was not over their zeal to keep even the smallest matters of the law, this he said they should have done;[24] but their problem was in omitting the weightier matters. The clash was over their being so zealous for their legal minutia, *while ignoring the enormous qualities of love, grace, mercy and faith.* In comparison, the Pharisees were like those today who would keep the exterior finishes of their car—the chrome, etc., meticulously clean, while completely ignoring the more critical internal problems of the engine. Jesus rebuked such inconsistent keeping of the law as hypocritical (Matt. 23).

These clashes gradually closed tightly the minds of the traditionalists against our Lord. The time came when they could no longer take such castigation for their hypocrisies as spoken by Jesus. This was especially true because they could not resist "the wisdom from which he spake." The road to Calvary was growing extremely narrow for Jesus. Pride, envy and prejudice would have their day. The know-it-alls knew little at all. They did not know they were trying to put their own Creator to death. They viewed any opposition as a threat to their cause and were willing to destroy anything in their way, even an innocent sinless soul. How sad that our beautiful, beautiful world is destined to become a charred cinder because of man's blind and impenitent sins.[25]

(d) *Jesus' belief in the universal Fatherhood of God divided the Pharisees from him.* To the Pharisee, the Jews were not only the extent of God's family, there simply was no goodness to be found anywhere else in the world. The Gentiles had one destiny: *they were fuel for the fires of hell.* Those outside of Israel were only dogs. This is exactly what

kindled such intense anger against Jesus in the synagogue at Nazareth when he preached his first hometown sermon. In this sermon he pointed to historic periods when obedient faith among the Gentiles exceeded faith among the Jews.[26]

One would think that after eight centuries of reading the book of Jonah, they would have believed in the universal God. Apparently it had had little effect as they cast Jesus out of their worship service for teaching on this subject. Both Isaiah and Micah prophesied that God's blessing would include "all nations" (Isa. 2:2ff; Mic. 4:1ff.).

But we should not feel so righteous in this respect. After two millenniums of Christian doctrine, deep roots of exclusiveness among professing Christians still exist. Some would still confine God to a particular hemisphere, country or brand of politics. It is fearful that some in the western world seem to think that God speaks only the English language.

Jesus kindled the flames of his rejection even further by referring to a Samaritan's loving response to a victim of robbers after a priest and Levite had passed him by.[27] Jesus also spoke of Gentiles from all over the earth obtaining an equal part in God's kingdom with the highest spiritual worthies of the Old Testament. These faithful Gentiles, Jesus commented, would enter the kingdom *before the Jews.* This broad international inclusion of the faithful was more than the exclusive Pharisees could take. They found themselves at a hopeless impasse with Jesus. Therefore the party joined a coalition of other self interested sects to completely eradicate Jesus.

D. The Sadducees Join the Opposition

Considering the broad breech that had developed between the Pharisees and the Sadducees over the centuries, a coalition of these sects in anything would seem impossible. Common causes, however, force enemies into temporary alliances to obtain what they want most at the moment. Jesus was felt to be an equal threat to both the Sadducees and Pharisees.

The Sadducees composed the elite party of the Jews. They were strongly politically oriented and sought to maintain control of the Sanhedrin court by any means possible. They generally were from the wealthier priestly class and very materialistically inclined. Consequently, they had high interests in maintaining business as usual. They made quite a display of religion, but were generally willing to choose a course of action that was best suited to maintain the status quo. They were unyielding conservatives and opposed to anything that might upset relationships with Rome. Unlike their Selucidae (the Greeks) oppressors, Rome had been willing for them to continue their Judaistic worship. They were not about to simply ignore Jesus. They interpreted his beliefs and tremendous popularity as a threat to their relationship with Rome. Jesus just might form a coalition among the Jews and Gentiles through his messianic movement which might be misunderstood by Rome. This would lead to political conflict which might place the leadership of the Sadducees in jeopardy. It would threaten the religious concessions they had won through hard struggles over the years. They stood no chance to win an all out conflict with Rome and might lose all—Jerusalem, the Temple and even to practice Judaism. Alfred Edersheim remarks of this:

"But what was to be done? They had not the courage of, though the wish for, judicial murder, till he who was High Priest, Caiphas, reminded them of the well-known Jewish adage, that 'it is better one man should die, than the community perish.' Yet, even so, he who spoke was the High-Priest; and for the last time, in speaking the sentence he spoke it forever against himself and the office he held, spake through God's Voice, not as regards the counsel of murder, but this, that His Death should be for that nationally, as John adds, not only for Israel, but to gather into one fold all the now scattered children of God."[28]

Doctrinally speaking, the Sadducees rejected the added interpretations of the law by the Pharisees, holding only to the Pentateuch as inspired Scripture. They denied the resur-

rection of the dead, the immortality of the soul and belief in angels and spirits. They had no faith in the coming Messiah. We can understand why they avidly opposed Jesus as he espoused the very things they were against. His attacks against their temple practices served to undermine their authority. Jesus was bold in his opposition to them. His preaching sounded like a trumpet calling troops together for God. It was extremely attractive and convincing to the common folk. Therefore the verdict of the Jewish hierarchy was that this man was worthy of death. They would silence him once for all and rid themselves of this very grave threat. The world must be made safe for Judaism.

So the Sadducees joined forces with the Pharisees to destroy the impact of Jesus. Their attempts to turn people away from the Nazarene received a tremendous boost when Jesus refused to bow to the demands of the crowds who wanted to fashion Jesus into their own style of king and Messiah (Jno. 6:15). When Jesus rejected their demands to march into Jerusalem and establish himself upon an earthly throne, they were filled with disillusionment (Jno. 7:66). Jesus was fully aware of the fickleness of a crowd's temperament; especially those composed of pressure groups that would not hesitate to exploit someone's popularity for their selfish purposes.

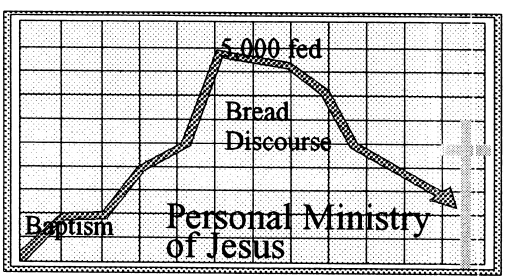
Such are not true disciples. First, these seek to praise public figures; next, they lavish gifts upon them for favors and finally, they attempt to coerce them into supporting their special interest agenda. Jesus was first seen as a promising young zealot, ripe for exploitation. Many viewed him as a possible means for seizing the kingdom for themselves.[29] Once they understood Jesus had a mind and will of his own, far afield from their own ambitions and that he would not permit himself to be used, the minds of these disappointed Jews became a fertile field for the high priests to plant seeds of character defamation against Jesus.

Caiphas and Annas, the high priests and dominate figures in the Sanhedrin, successfully exploited this disillusionment to form a powerful backing to destroy Jesus. The Gospel of John points to three types of people concerned with Jesus: *the king makers, the king followers, and the king killers.* The first group wanted to make Jesus a king after their own design to serve their own interests.[30] The second group were those who believed in Jesus, accepted his word as the word of life and followed him as the Son of God.[31] The third group was composed of many from the first group who moved to eliminate Jesus after realizing they could not manage and mold him to suit their own self interests.[32]

The greatness of Jesus towers in the exemplary way he responded to these political manipulations. He could have retaliated with character assassination himself. There was plenty of evidence and personal motivation for it. To the contrary, Jesus chose to stick to the main issue—*belief in the word of God.* The content of Jesus' preaching was aimed directly at the heart. He called for sweeping changes from evident hypocrisies to dealing honestly with fellowman and with God. He advocated such impractical absurdities for them as "*love your enemies*," and "*do good to them that despitefully use you.*" The people were challenged to love one another as each loved themselves. Beginning at the heart, the source of malignancy, the whole cancer of sin had to be excised. If their eye was the offender, it had to be plucked out; if their hand prevented them from entering into a right relationship with God, it had to be cut off.

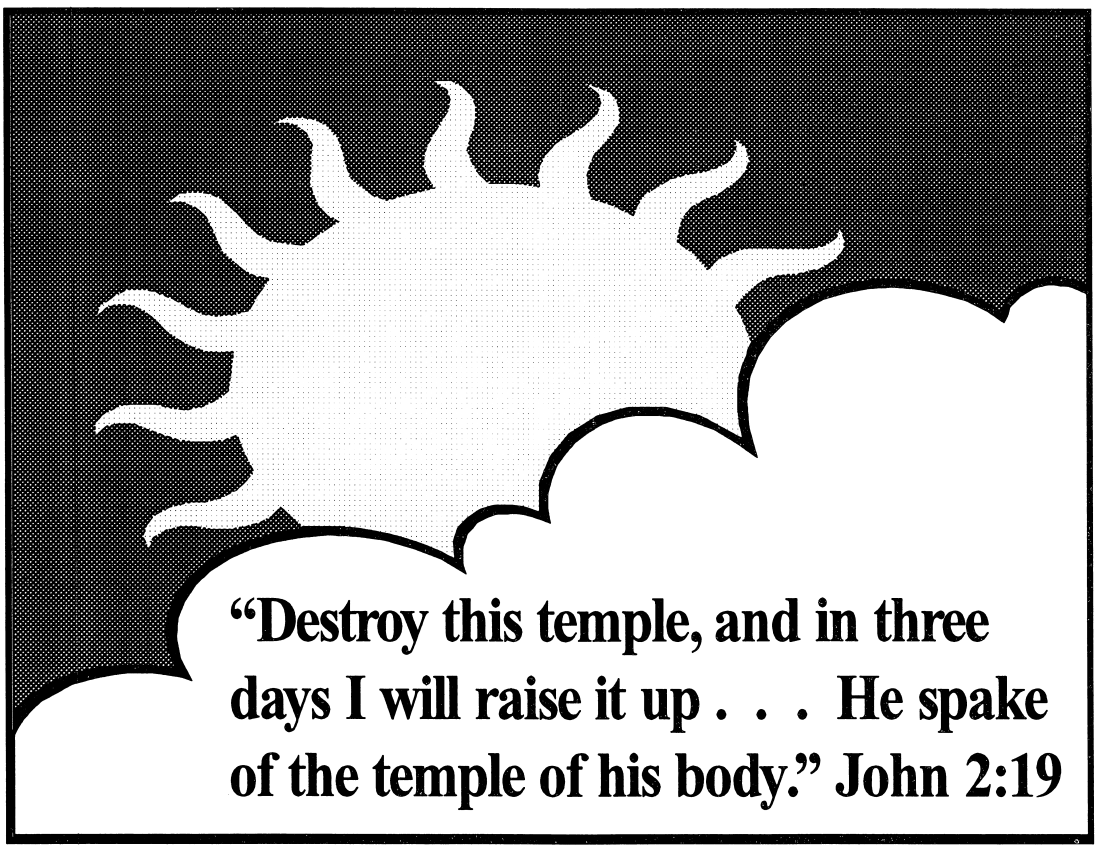
E. Jesus lost the crowds

At first they were attracted to him, but they melted away. Jesus' radical selfless preaching could not continue to attract and hold



large crowds over an extended period. It was far too impractical for a dog-eat-dog world. Jesus was militant for God— to uncover God from all human distortions contained in the elder's traditions. There was no room for softness with Satan, nor any place given for those who wanted compromise. Jesus refused to conform to the demands of a crowd who wanted him to exploit his power but ignore his message. Jesus' rebuff, along with the constant poisoning of minds by the Pharisees and Sadducees caused the hopes of the politically motivated to grow dim. So the crowds vaporized, except for a few disciples who stood by him. He asked these, "*Would ye also go away?*"[33] At the cross a few good people stood by in horror to grieve his dying. The gate into the eternal life was far too narrow and the path to the kingdom of heaven much too rough for the crowds to tread.

The road for Jesus narrowed as he neared Jerusalem, the beloved city of David, on the final Passover of his life. One can almost hear Jesus repeating these words, "*I have a baptism to be baptized with; and how am I straitened til it is accomplished!*"[34] Thus his determination deepened to see his course through to the end, thereby making salvation possible for all. He was entering Jerusalem for his final Passover and he knew that Jerusalem was the graveyard for the prophets.[35] His baptism of suffering had been divinely assigned before the foundation of the world. Now he must accomplish it.[36] The zeal of his Father's house was consuming him, so Jesus set his face to enter Jerusalem. Jesus lived under the determinate counsel of God. His last trek into Jerusalem was not a foot dragging, slumping figure beaten down by a consuming dread. Here was the King marching into his city for his coronation. His entrance received a momentary flare of acclamation. Very soon the King will reign as the King of kings in a very different way than all realized.



References

1. Matthew 23:37
2. Acts 7:52
3. Luke 3:23-24.
5. Luke 9:31
6. Matthew 23:15
7. Matthew 15:8-9; Revelation 22:18-19
8. Matthew 27:28; John 11:45ff.
9. Matthew 5:19-20
10. John 4;27; John 8:10-11
11. Matthew 13:54ff.
12. John 11:49-53
13. Luke 18:11
14. I Corinthians 11:28; II Corinthians 13:5
15. Luke 17:10; Romans 10:13ff.; Romans 5:1
16. Acts 5:36-37
17. Acts 4:13
18. Stewart, p. 137, *Op. cit.,* page 49.
19. Matthew 8:10-11. See also Luke 4:16ff.
20. Luke 17:10
21. I John 4:8
22. James 1:27
23. Galatians 1:10
24. Matthew 23:23
25. II Peter 3:10
26. Matthew 8:10-11
27. Luke 10:30
28. Alfred Edersheim. *The Life and Times of Jesus the Messiah.* Vol. I (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Wm. B. Eerdmans publishing Co.,1962), p. 225.
29. John 6:15
30. *Ibid.*
31. John 6:67-69
32. John 11:47-53
33. John 6:67-69
34. Luke 13:13
35. Luke 13:37
36. Luke 12:20

Questions for Chapter Eighteen

1. Discuss Jesus' awareness of the cross that awaited him.
2. What made it easy for the Pharisees to oppose Jesus?
3. What does the name Pharisee mean? Discuss it.
4. Worship is a time for what kind of examination? How is this best accomplished?
5. Why were Jesus' Messianic claims opposed?

—Read This—

O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, thou that killest the prophets, and stonest them which are sent unto thee, how often would I have gathered thy children together, even as a hen gathereth her chickens under her wings, and ye would not! Behold, your house is left unto you desolate. For I say unto you, Ye shall not see me henceforth, till ye shall say, Blessed is he that cometh in the name of the Lord. —Matthew 23:37-39

Outline for Chapter Nineteen

O Jerusalem, Jerusalem

I. A Cry of Pity and an Ominous Warning
  A. Friday: six days before the crucifixion
  B. The Sabbath: five days before the crucifixion
  C. Sunday: Four days before the crucifixion
    1. The significance of riding on "a colt of an ass."
    2. Jesus was not seeking to establish an earthly throne
    3. The fatal blow is delivered to the serpent
    4. The Jews could not destroy the true Temple
  D. Monday: the cleansing of the temple
    1. The purpose of the fig tree narrative
  E. Tuesday: parables, trap questions and discourse
    1. The parable of the two sons
    2. The parable of the wedding feast
    3. Paying taxes to Caesar
    4. The Sadducees ridicule Jesus' belief in the resurrection
    5. Which is the greatest commandment?
    6. The hypocrisy of external religion
    7. Tuesday evenin
  F. Wednesday: a day of rest
  G. Thursday: The upper room experience
    1. The highway to honor is by the lowly road of service
    2. The Lord and Master washes the disciples' feet
    3. Jesus did not want Judas to be lost
    4. The darkness that Judas entered

BEHOLD, I HAVE TOLD YOU BEFORE

Chapter Nineteen

O Jerusalem, Jerusalem

Matthew 23:37

They stand, those halls of Zion,
All jubilant with song,
And bright with many an angel,
And all the martyr throng. . .
—Bernard of Cluny

1. A CRY OF PITY AND AN OMINOUS WARNING

"Oh Jerusalem, Jerusalem, thou that killest the prophets, and stonest them which are sent unto thee, how often would I have gathered thy children together, even as a hen gathered her chickens under her wings, and ye would not!" —Matthew 23:37

The saviour's plaintive cry over rebellious Jerusalem is reminiscent of Jeremiah weeping for the city seven centuries earlier. It is a cry of pity and an ominous warning combined. Many have written about the lengthening shadows for Jesus in the immediate wake of this statement, but the shadows are lengthening, not so much for him, *as for the Jewish nation.*

On his way into the city to claim it for his own, Jesus sadly lamented with tears: *"If you had known, even you, especially in this your day, the things that make for your peace! But now they are hidden from your eyes. For the days will come upon you when your enemies will build an embankment around you, surround you and close you in on every side, and level you, and your children within you to the ground; and they will not leave in you one stone upon another, because you did not know the time of your visitation."*[1] Later, when the women wept for Jesus on the Via Dolorosa, he spoke these admonishing words: *"Daughters of Jerusalem, weep not for me, but weep for yourselves and for your children. For indeed the days are coming in which they will say, Blessed are the barren, the wombs that never bore, and the breasts which never nursed! Then they will begin to say to the mountains, Fall on us! and to the hills Cover us! For if they do these things in the green wood, what will be done in the dry?"*[2] The destruction of their beloved city of Zion was soon coming upon them. Because they rejected the Light of Jesus' word, the Spirit of God would depart from the Temple, both it and the precious city would be destroyed; and their minds shrouded in total darkness. God had once again, in Jesus, stretched forth his arms in mercy to bring them back into the fold of safety but they, as their fathers had done, were rejecting God's prophet. This time it was God's Son they would crucify. Jesus had

been in Jerusalem on numerous occasions for various feasts. John centered most of his gospel in Jerusalem and emphasized the last events in Jesus' life in more detail than the Synoptics. He records Jesus attending four feasts in the holy city. By noting the time of the October Feast of Tabernacles in John 7:2, the December Feast of Dedication in John 10:22, and the March crucifixion Passover, one can determine the flow of events. If the feast mentioned in John 2:13 is a Passover, it would make this occurrence a little over three years since Jesus' baptism by John. Regardless, we have arrived within a few days of the final Passover in Jesus' life. Great crowds of Jews and proselytes are amassing themselves for the holy festival.

A. Friday: six days before the last Passover (John 12:1)

John states it was six days before the Passover when Jesus arrived at the home of Mary, Martha and Lazarus.[3] By counting six days backward from Thursday on which the Passover fell, one arrives at Friday of the previous week. This was the time of the party at which Mary anointed Jesus' with a costly ointment. Jesus said she had done this *for his burial.*

B. The Sabbath day: five days before the last Passover

The day after the above events was the Sabbath before the passion week. It seems that Jesus spent this day in quiet meditation. He must have contemplated his actions at the Temple the next day, *which would be the first day of the week.* The last Sabbath Jesus spent alive on earth was spent in peace and worship.

C. Sunday: four days before the last Passsover

"Rejoice greatly, O daughter of Zion; shout, O daughter of Jerusalem: behold, thy King cometh unto thee: he is just, and having salvation; lowly, and riding upon an ass, and upon a colt the foal of an ass." Zec. 9:9

On this first day of the week King Jesus came to claim his city.[4] After a Friday night celebration in his honor, and a final Sabbath with loved ones, the moment came for him to begin one of the most public and intensive weeks in his ministry. This is the last week of his earthly life; the final hour is approaching and much last minute work has to be done. He is nigh the hour at which the throne of David will be reestablished by the promised seed.[5]

The word was out that Jesus was in Bethany and that he would be entering Jerusalem on a particular road. On Sunday morning Jesus begins a trek of almost three miles from Bethany to Jerusalem. Huge crowds of pilgrims were moving in a steady stream toward the adored city. Excited about their holy pilgrimage, many of the pilgrims eagerly lined the road to catch a glimpse of *the prophet from Nazareth* coming that way.

Jesus' popularity had ebbed and flowed in the past and here once more was a great rush of temporary acclaim as he entered the city for his unusual coronation.

Little did the multitude of Jewish pilgrims lining the road realize the impact their actions were having upon the future history of mankind. Let us remember, these who are singing hosannas and strewing palm leaves before our Lord are not those who have been plotting his death in Jerusalem. Those busy contemplating his death are the intelligentsia of Judaism, the high court officials of the Sanhedrin, the Sadducees, the Pharisees, scribes and most of all, the priests.

Crowds are extremely fickle and can be exploited by diabolical shrewdness of politi-

cians like Caiphas and his father-in-law, Annas. Caiphas held the post of High Priest at this time, but Annas was High Priest emeritus. Annas, an astute politician, still held powerful influence in Jerusalem and both of them were successful in overrunning legalities in their haste to eliminate Jesus.

The pilgrims filing into the city to celebrate the Passover are very honest in shouting their hosannas to Jesus as he entered into the city. They meant every word of their welcoming shout, "*blessed is he who cometh in the name of the Lord.*" Neither are we to suppose that everyone in town entered into the ungodly acts which came at the close of the week.

Regarding those who shouted these acclamations, James S. Stewart writes:

> *They were no doubt provincials, his own countrymen from Galilee in the north—an entirely different crowd from the rabble which was to cry, Crucify him before the week was over. It must not be forgotten that even after the tide of popular sentiment had begun to set against him, and indeed up to the very last, there were thousands of people to whom Jesus remained a friend and a hero—people whom he had healed of bodily diseases, families whose tangled home life he had straightened out, men and women for whom spiritually he had made all things new. They brought their tribute to him now. Amid the shouts of the welcoming throng the king rode toward his capital.*[6]

1. The significance of riding on "a colt of an ass."

There was deep spiritual significance in everything that happened on each day during this final week on earth by our Lord. Even Jesus entering Jerusalem on the "colt of an ass" signified that the King was coming to his city to reign in peace. The kings of olden days who came to capture and enslave cities approached on stallions draped with all the trappings of royalty to impress everyone with their power and dominion, but when they came on a mission of peace, they rode into the city on a lowly burro. When the watchers, perched high on the city walls, caught sight of a king approaching in this humble fashion, they knew his mission was peaceful. This heralded comfort and good tidings to all. In this way Jesus signaled his mission of peace as he approached Jerusalem. He came as Prince of Salem, meaning Prince of Peace. This act of lowliness may have been as disappointing to some of his disciples who looked for a militant Messiah as his washing their feet was a few days later. Many hoped for a Messiah who would deliver Jerusalem from foreign domination and restore David's throne and power. Most who longed for this type of Messiah were found among the Zealots.

2. Jesus was not seeking to establish an earthly throne.

By his approach on the colt of an ass, Jesus signified that his kingdom was not of this world and that he did not come to assume an earthly throne. He was coming in meekness and kindness. His plan was to surrender to his enemies and allow them to put him to death. He would thereby reveal an intriguing mystery unexplained for centuries. Through a complex series of paradoxes, he would: (1) conquer his kingdom by being conquered; (2) deliver the captives by becoming a captive; (3) win over evil by willingly losing to it, and (4) bring life to believers by being put to death by unbelievers. In such a mysterious and paradoxical way, he would resurrect believers to a new life from among unbelievers who were dead in their sins.

The great prophet spoken of by Moses had finally arrived, and in true keeping with their father's murderous attitude toward all the other prophets, the present Judaists were ready to kill him also. So, Jesus wept over the repeated hardness of the city's heart because, this time they were rejecting more than a prophet, they were rejecting God's last appeal of love by murdering the Prince of Prophets—God's Son.

3. The fatal blow is delivered to the serpent.

Allowing himself to be put to death was the fatal blow to the serpent's head.[7] The blood the executioners would cause to flow from the Saviour's wounds would become a cleansing fountain to wash the guilty stain of sin from the souls of men. This entry into Jerusalem was much more than a king coming in triumph, it was the pre-planned self-sacrifice of God, offering himself in the flesh as the Lamb "without spot or blemish" to remove the sins of the world. The Lamb was coming to the Passover to be slain; that by means of his blood, the angel bringing the judgment of eternal death for sin might pass over all believers trusting in that blood.[8]

The Passover had been observed since the escape of the children of Israel from Pharaoh's bondage. For centuries they had slain their paschal lamb in commemoration of their being made free from slavery. These sacrifices were made at the Temple each year. But a sacrifice had to be perfect before it could be accepted. In addition, the Temple and altar had to be spiritually clean before the gift could be offered. If they had been defiled, they had to be cleansed.

Due mainly to the incursion of enemies, the Temple at various times had been polluted. When this occurred, they cleansed and rededicated it so they could offer acceptable sacrifices once again to God. Antiochus IV and the Greeks polluted the Temple in 169 B.C. (Cf. I Macc. 1:20-29; 2 Macc. 5:11-17; 6:18). After routing the Greeks from Jerusalem, Judas Maccabbees rededicated the Temple exactly three years later in the month of Kislev (December), 164 B.C. The Feast of Dedication (Hanukkah) was declared an annual celebration in memory of this event.

Jesus now was coming to offer himself as a perfectly qualified sacrifice, truly without spot and without blemish, but he found the Temple again defiled; not by pagans, but by the covetous priests acting like pagans. Jesus denounced the holy site as a "den of thieves."[9] He enters Jerusalem to cleanse the Temple once again in preparation for the offering of the perfect sacrifice of himself. Thus, in this act, as also at his baptism, it became Jesus to "fulfill all righteousness."

4. The Jews could not destroy the true Temple.

"Destroy *this temple and in three days I will raise it up*" Jesus promised (Jno. 2:19). There is a very close association between the literal meaning of the Temple and the Temple of his body. By making it a den of merchandise, they had polluted the literal Temple, driving the Spirit of God from his holy dwelling place. It could not return because of perpetual defilement and unacceptable sacrifices. Now, they were about to separate the Spirit of God from its fleshly body by murdering Jesus, but this Temple was pure and undefiled. God would use the period of separation to preach to the dead, but the Spirit would return to its clean habitation and dwell forever, performing intercessory duties as the Christian's High Priest (I Pet. 3:18-19; Heb. 9:24).

In this conversation that Jesus had with those contemplating his murder, there is this ominous warning: When you destroy this Temple (his body), it will be the end of your Temple and the finish of Judaism. Crucify me and you will nail your own religious system to the cross (Col. 2:14). When the Spirit of God returned, it did not return to the old Temple of stones, it took up its habitation in the sanctuary of living stones (I Pet. 2:1ff.)

In three days he fulfilled this promise. After that, he remained for forty days with the apostles, instructing them in things about the kingdom. He then ascended to the Father, telling them to wait in Jerusalem for the return of the Spirit. Ten days later, on the day of Pentecost, the Holy Spirit came. It enlivened the church, causing the little body of believers to become the first living stones in the new spiritual Temple of God.[10] The old Temple remained under the curse mentioned in Matthew 23, and was destined to be de-

stroyed in 70 A.D. by the Romans.

D. Monday: the cleansing of the Temple* (John 2:13-17)

Jesus rises early on the second day of the passion week and travels the three miles from Bethany into Jerusalem without breakfast. On his inward journey, a fig tree looms in the distance with the appearance of having fruit to satisfy his hunger. Drawing closer, our Lord finds the tree barren of fruit and forthwith places a curse upon it.

There are many things which we cannot fully understand surrounding the cursing of this fig tree by our Saviour, but there is one thing that stands out firmly and clearly—*it signals the inspiration of the word of God as perhaps no other scripture in all the New Testament.* Frequently difficult passages such as these verses are cited to indicate discrepancies in the scriptures. "If the Bible is inspired," some point out, "why are there such apparent inconsistencies as Matthew stating that the fig tree withered immediately, while Mark says the withering process occurred the next day?" Such incongruities, they say, should not exist if the Bible is the inspired, inerrant word of God. Also, to support their contention, attention is directed to Mark's account where Jesus cursed the tree for not bearing its fruit out of season. "How could this be the fault of the tree?" some critics ask. This is worth pondering.

First, you can't have it both ways. These critics say the Bible is a product of man, and that it has been edited by various redactors over the centuries. If so, the following question looms large: *Would not these Bible editors have a desire to protect the Bible from such scathing criticism generated by such difficult passages? Why, then, did not these intelligent redactors edit out these apparent difficulties?* This would have instantly removed the problem. Why did not at least one of them at sometime, upon recognizing Mark's confusing statement, "*For the time of figs was not yet,*" (Mk. 11:13) just delete it from the context? Since some critics presume the Bible to have been edited in the ancient past, why would these critics not have rewritten this text, and do a tremendous service for their cause? They could have easily removed Mark's statement that says, "*it was not the season for figs.*" Yet, the text, just as it is, has survived the centuries. *The fact that the text has remained as it is defies reasoning that any sympathetic tampering with the text has occurred.* If so, why did not someone correct what seems to some a major problem of inconsistency? Apparently, the Holy Spirit wanted the text exactly as it is since he has protected its context along with the rest of the Bible.

The difficulties encountered in this context in no wise argue against its non-inspiration; they argue for it. God has provided the passage and left it as it is for a purpose. The question is, then, what purpose does it serve? To understand the point being made by the evangelist, the following things must be observed in the narrative about the fig tree.

1. The purpose of the fig tree narrative.

First, let us recall the curse spoken in judgment against the Jewish tree by John the Baptist. In Matthew 3:8 John challenges the Jews who came to his baptism to "*bring forth fruits meet for repentance.*" According to John the Baptist, the Jew was taking unwarranted comfort in tracing his lineage to Abraham. John warned them saying: "*Now the axe is laid at the root of the trees: therefore every tree which bringeth not forth good fruit is hewn down, and cast into the fire.*"[11] Here John says the whole Jewish tree is sick and warns that the judgment of God is against those Israelites not bearing the fruit of holiness for God, and that judgment was coming by the Messiah when the ailing national tree would be removed. During the last week of his life, Jesus' curse against the fig tree

* There is some disagreement on the events which occurred on each day of the final week of Jesus' life and are debated by some. The account of events given here follows the work of A. T. Robertson's, *A Harmony of the Gospels, Op. cit.*, which seem reliable.

symbolizes the judgment to be taken against the Jews who were barren of the fruit of faith in himself as the Son of God. Jesus approached the tree hungry. Should Jesus curse the fig tree because it had no fruit for him to eat? He refused to perform a miracle to feed himself in the first wilderness temptation. Would he now miraculously cause a tree to wither because he could not feed himself from it?

But there is a great difference here. Jesus did not perform a miracle to make the fig tree *bear fruit*, the miracle was performed because *it lacked fruit.* Since it was out of season, this incident clearly was not placed here to be examined by horticulturists. It is here to depict the great disappointment that beset Jesus over *the lack of spiritual productivity in the Jewish nation.* Eight centuries earlier Isaiah had pointed out that God had done everything possible to make his vineyard produce good fruit (Isa. 5). Finally, the hour for harvest had come when the Jewish vineyard should have produced the best fruit in its existence: *faith in Jesus as the Son of God.* By their knowledge of the Law, they should have seen him as the embodiment of that Law—its completeness. *The hunger of Jesus is to be seen as God hungering for the fruit of faith in his Word from his people.*

Our understanding this is greatly assisted when viewed with the parable of the fruitless fig tree in Luke 13:6ff. In Luke's parable, he is telling the Jews that God is looking for fruit on the Jewish national tree. Clearly the husbandman is God. Jesus is the vine dresser who will cut down the fruitless tree.

Jesus' hunger as he approached Jerusalem is a symbolic hunger for faithfulness among his people. He had found none among the officials of Judaism, therefore the judgment of God was to be carried out against the tree, even to the root. When Mark tells the reader it was "not the season for figs," he is telling us that the lesson was not about the literal tree, *but the spiritual tree—Israel.* The curse, then, is not against a mere fig tree for not bearing fruit out of season, but against the Jewish nation still barren of spiritual fruit after centuries of divine husbandry. The question asked was, "*Why cumbereth it the ground?*" (Lu. 13:7) Another significance concerning Mark's mentioning that it was not the season for figs is, he wants the reader to understand that *the withering of the fig tree could not be explained due to being the harvest season and therefore being only a natural withering due to seasonal changes.* The power of Jesus' spoken word is the only observable cause for the tree to have withered. During this last week, Jesus was winding down his earthly ministry. He came to the holy city for the last time to claim his right as the prophesied King, to inherit David's throne and to cleanse the Temple in preparation for his perfect sacrifice to God. By doing this, he would bring the judgment of God upon Israel for rejecting their incarnate God right before their eyes.

According to John, it is on the second day of his final week that Jesus assumed the duties of the heavenly High Priest when he cleansed the Temple. This marks the second occasion for this in his career. This he does in preparation for offering himself as the perfect sacrifice unto God. The true Temple, Jesus' heart, had never been defiled. The unclean earthly Temple, now ceremonially purified by him, is ready for the Lamb of God to be offered in a few days. Every sacrifice offered under the old system had pointed toward this perfect sacrifice. Yet, they thrust him outside the camp to be offered outside the gates. Jesus demonstrated his divine authority by underscoring them with miracles of healing at the Temple in the wake of its cleansing.

E. Tuesday: parables, trap questions and discourses

The third day of the passion week was the busiest of all. After reaching the Temple early in the morning, the Jews questioned Jesus about his authority for teaching there.[12] Jesus countered by asking them by what authority John baptized. They refused to answer him because the people believed John was a prophet from God and they knew he

had great influence in Jerusalem. Remember also, *John the Baptist had given testimony that Jesus was the Messiah.* Even though it was commonly accepted that John was a prophet who spoke and baptized by the authority of God, still the Jewish hierarchy refused to acknowledge John's endorsement of Jesus as the Messiah. This placed those Jews who rejected Jesus in the position of also rejecting John whom the people believed was a prophet from God.

This placed them in an awkward position of opposing Jesus, John, and the people. It also indicates that the malignancy of their heart soil had reached the point where no more fruit for God could ever be borne.[13] There is no more solemn warning to a nation in all the Bible than that given Israel by John the Baptist when he said, "*the axe is laid at the root of the tree.*"

1. The parable of the two sons (Matt. 21:28-32).

In this parable, the Jews are represented by the first son. He agreed to harvest fruit in response to the father's command to go work in the vineyard, *but he did not do it.* The Gentiles are represented by the second son. At first he refused to work in the vineyard, *but later repented and obeyed the father's request to go labor for him.* Jesus interprets his own parable by saying those whom the Jews perceived as sinners believed John the Baptist's testimony that Jesus was the Christ. But the Jews, who looked upon themselves as heirs of the kingdom, had forfeited their inheritance through disbelief. The Gentiles, represented by the second son in the parable, needed to repent for refusing to work for God. They did repent and worked in the vineyard. The Jews needed to repent for breaking their promise to God to work. They refused to repent.

The parable that follows the Two Sons concerns itself also with the theme of fruit bearing. Matthew 21:34 states: "*Now when vintage time drew near, he sent his servants to the vine dressers, that they might receive fruit.*" The result this time not only produced no fruit, but those in charge of the vineyard slew the owner's son. Judgment is quickly pronounced: "*The kingdom shall be taken from you and given to a nation (the believing Gentiles) bearing the fruits of it. And whoever falls on this stone will be broken: but on whomever it falls, it will grind him to powder.*"

It is no wonder Jesus lamented, "O Jerusalem, Jerusalem . . . ." The terrible judgment of the husbandman had come upon his fruitless vineyard. They had hardened themselves against their own law embodied in Jesus, *the ultimate mercy of God.* Four days after the cursing of this fig tree, the crucifixion would occur, signifying the ultimate rejection of God's Word against themselves. This would set in motion the extra year of grace given in the parable in Luke 13:8. During this extra spiritual period of grace lasting from the crucifixion to 70 A.D., the Jewish national tree was given additional time to accept the preached Word of the kingdom of God. Not being receptive to this, the vineyard owner's order in the parable was literally carried out (Heb. 10:26-31). God, using a pagan for the axe, removed the fruitless tree when Rome destroyed Jerusalem in 70 A.D. "*O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, thou that killest the prophets, and stonest them which are sent unto thee, how oft would I have gathered thee . . . .*" Through the pleadings of the prophets, God had repeatedly offered to gather Israel together as a hen gathered her brood under her wings, The only response was to murder Jesus, the Prophet and Messiah of promise. Stubborn Israel had placed a veil of tradition before her face which blinded them to the mercy offered in God's Son. Sadly, the veil remains until this very day.[14]

2. The parable of the wedding feast (Matt. 22).

This parable also addresses Jesus' rejection by the Jews. It pictures their refusal of an invitation to a great marriage feast. The Gentiles that were also invited responded in appreciation, but the Jews made light of their

invitation and treated the heralders of the wedding spitefully for which they were judged unworthy of the invitation. After their mockery of the invitation, strangers (Gentiles) were invited and are gathered into the wedding from "the highways and byways."

One other thing stands out clearly: Those invited to the wedding cannot attend the feast without proper attire. One man insisted on attending in apparel of his own choice. This was a great insult to the host who had provided proper matching garments at great cost and trouble. By refusing to wear the wedding clothes supplied by the host, the audacious guest despised the whole affair.

The lesson seems obvious: No one will be permitted to attend the marriage feast of the Lamb robed in his own righteousness. Only the undefiled white robes of Christ's righteousness will be worn at the affair. Nothing unclean will enter the wedding feast.

Let all nominal church members beware who would write their own terms for membership. The church is the *bride of Christ.*[15] He who accepts Christ's invitation to attend the great wedding must *put off the old man and put on the new.*[16] Membership is never on our terms, and neither can we be saved by our own righteousness which Isaiah calls "filthy rags." (Isa. 64:6)

Christians clothed in undefiled robes, cleansed by having been washed in his blood, will receive honorable seats at the feasts.

3. Paying taxes to Caesar.

In Matthew 22:15-22, Jesus teaches a great lesson concerning Christian responsibility to the civil government. The Jews sought to entrap Jesus by getting him to take a doctrinal position against Rome. For such, they could have had him arrested. They asked him if one should pay taxes to Caesar. In a divine display of wisdom, Jesus asked for a coin. Upon receiving it, he asked them whose image it bore. They replied, "Caesar's." Note carefully the word "image" in the question—"Whose is *this* ***image***?" The obvious answer was to give Caesar the coin made in his image. *But since man has been made in the image of God, we owe our souls to God, not Caesar.*

Separation between the kingdom of God and the national government is taught by Jesus in Matthew 22:15-22. The kingdom of God posed no threat to the civil government. The government is the protector of its citizens and in that sense is the agent of God for good. The Christian should pay taxes because he enjoys the protection and blessings of good government. No Christian is to be a freeloader on society (The Christian's responsibility to civil government is taught by Paul in Romans 13).

4. The Sadducees ridicule Jesus' belief in the resurrection.

The theme of Jesus' teaching in Matthew 22:23-33 is that anyone having more than one marriage (scriptural, of course) will not present any problems in the resurrection. The Sadducees loved to ridicule the resurrection of the dead by pointing out impossible social situations that would exist from multiple spouses. They believed a general resurrection would create a confusing and unmanageable situation. Jesus rebuked them sharply, saying that all earthly contracts and relationships end at death. He also quoted them this scripture: "*I am the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob.*" This verse declares that God has a perpetual living relationship with the patriarchs. This is signified by Moses having written the verse in the *present tense, even though these faithful men had been dead for over 300 years.*[17] Jesus' explanation of this verse illustrated that the Sadducees did not understand the sacred scrolls they loved to display in the broad phylacteries on their sleeves. Jesus further showed their inconsistency in rejecting the resurrection when he added: "*God is not a God of the dead, but of the living.*" By opposing the resurrection, the Sadducees were confining God's power and glory *to time!* To do this would make Jehovah a lonely God whose work always

ends in death. All creation would be *irredeemably doomed* because death would be more powerful than God. Thus, extreme hardness is observed on the part of the Sadducees who were willing to deny the omnipotence of God just to maintain their theory against the resurrection of the dead.

Oh Jerusalem, Jerusalem! Jesus mourned the holy city because of their sad history of executing God's prophets. Now, they are about to crucify Jesus, the greatest prophet of all—*Christ, the Son of God.* In three days the Sanhedrin, the highest Jewish court, will violate their own law to rush Jesus' death before the Passover. Will they be convinced of his resurrection by his empty tomb which they cannot explain? Sadly, the answer is no. They will search for false witnesses and pay them to relate an obvious impossible story about someone stealing him from the grave, even though they had posted guards at the site to prevent this from happening. Roman guards were the most disciplined troops on earth. They knew they would pay with their lives if they fell asleep on duty. The Sadducees were willing to go to any extreme, lie or whatever, to avoid being completely embarrassed by Jesus' resurrection. They still deny it.

At Calvary, when the awful deed had run its course the massive veil in the Temple was torn from top to bottom. One can only imagine how quickly the old political Sadducees, Annas and Caiphas, called for the curtain to be mended and re-hung. It never occurred to them that this mysterious rending of the curtain was only God signifying that an entrance into the Most Holy had been made possible for penitents by the cleansing blood of Jesus. God had used their evil deed at Calvary to open a door into heaven. One can almost hear them shouting across the centuries to the Temple custodians: "Quick, mend it! Let's get it back in place before this thing gets known." But they were fighting against God's plan which was predestined before the foundation of the world (Rev. 13:8).

5. Which is the greatest commandment?

This lesson concerning the greatest commandment (Matt. 22:34-35), is on the final Tuesday of Jesus' earthly life. In this lesson Jesus denounces attempts to keep the law without love. The legalists were busy attempting to discern the most important commands from those of lesser importance, without paying any attention to the principle of love. Jesus replied by saying that the total revelation of God could be kept acceptably only by loving God and fellowman. The rebuke is plain.

Those who claimed to obey the greatest of God's commands, yet were without love, had failed in all the commands of the law; for all true obedience must be motivated by compassionate love. Jesus states that on love *"hangs all the law and the prophets."* Paul addressed this subject in I Corinthians 13, stating: *"And though I bestow all my goods to feed the poor, and though I give my body to be burned, but have not love, it profits me nothing."*

When love toward God and fellowman is the sole motivator for obedience, the size of the command is irrelevant. Urgency in obedience is not determined legally, but lovingly. When a mother sees her child has wandered beyond a "no trespassing" sign and is in immediate peril, she does not stop to consider the legality of the situation, but in reckless love dashes past the sign to rescue her child from harm.

Thankfully God's love never considers the size of a transgression when a soul is in need of forgiveness and mercy. Our father never says to a broken and contrite heart, "you have sinned too much." Love keeps one faithful in both great and small matters. It offers mercy and forgiveness to those who have repented of great sins as well as to those whose sins may be considered small in com-

parison.

A loving heart would have known Jesus was truly keeping the Sabbath when he mercifully healed the sick, gave sight to the blind and fed the hungry on this day. Those who accused him of breaking the Sabbath offered God sacrifices on this holy day, but refused to show love and compassion to their neighbors.

By this, they were denying the purpose of the very sacrifices they were offering. Jesus said they should learn the relationship between mercy and sacrifice—*that mercy was preferred over ritual.*[18] "*Love one another as I have loved you,*" is Jesus' divine law (Jno. 13:34).

Later, Paul said that there "*abideth faith, hope, and charity (love), these three, and the greatest of these is love*" (I Cor. 13:13). John also said, "*this is the love of God, that we keep his commandments,*" and if someone says, "I love God, and hateth his brother, he is a liar . . ." (I Jno. 5:3; 4:20). This is the reason James says that breaking the law in one part, makes one guilty of breaking the whole. The law of love is broken in every single transgression. Love binds the whole law together.[19] O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, holy city of God, could you not see the love of God in Jesus standing right before you, extending the mercy of God to you?

6. The hypocrisy of external religion.

Matthew 23 contains seven great woes pronounced by Jesus against Jerusalem for a sin he particularly loathed—the sin of hypocrisy, *or external religion.* Woe after woe is pronounced upon those who "clean the outside of the cup and platter" but leave the inside filthy. He likened external religion to painting the outside of a tomb that contained only deadness within. Such people, he said, may have an outward appearance of righteousness, but inwardly they are full of hypocrisy and iniquity.

Jesus further demonstrated the Jews' hypocritical hardness by denouncing those who opposed him as having the same negativeness toward him that their fathers had toward the ancient prophets. They denied vigorously that they would have slain the ancient prophets as their fathers did, yet, in just three days they will prove Jesus true by killing him, God's greatest prophet in all history. This would prove themselves to be truly the children of their rebellious parents who murdered the ancient prophets. Such deeds, Jesus said, proved they were a generation of vipers with the judgment of hell hanging over their heads, and by crucifying him, they would bring upon themselves the righteous judgment of all the prophets from Abel down to their own time. "*O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, thou that killest the prophets, and stonest them which are sent unto thee, how often would I have gathered thy children together, even as a hen gathereth her chickens under her wings, and ye would not.*"

Jesus pronounced this final judgment against Jerusalem in the last two verses of Matthew 23: "*Behold, your house is left unto you desolate.*" Jerusalem rejected the counsel of God's prophets against herself and fell to the destructive sword of the Roman armies in 70 A. D., about 37 years later. Since Pentecost in Acts 2, the Spirit of God had been dwelling in the new temple made without hands—*the hearts of all believers.* It is no wonder that Peter declared Christians to be living stones. The heart of each believer is the new spiritual temple of the living God.[20] The Lord condemned the old Temple because they had made it a den of thieves. An Islamic temple now exists on the base of its ruins in Jerusalem.

7. Tuesday evening.

Tuesday evening was the beginning of the Jewish Wednesday of the passion week. According to Matthew and Mark, on this evening

a party was given in Jesus' honor at the home of Simon the Leper.* John places the setting in the home of Mary and Martha. A large group of people had gathered, not just because of Jesus' presence, but because they wanted to see Lazarus whom he had raised from the dead a few days earlier. Those who came to visit usually walked. They wore sandals with leather straps which exposed most of the feet to garbage, dust, mud and other refuse of the streets. One of the kindest acts of hospitality was to wash your guest's feet. This was usually performed by a household slave.

Out of the abandonment of love on this occasion, a certain Mary not only washed Jesus' feet, but poured a costly amount of perfume on them, filling the whole house with its odor. This seemed a great waste to Judas who viewed the act as a reckless deed. He argued the money could have been better spent feeding the poor. This, John says, was not his true motive, but because Judas wished Mary had given it to the treasury bag for the twelve. Judas was in charge of the bag and could have then spent the money as he desired. John adds that he "pilfered what was put into it." (Barclay translation) Evidently Judas had not been in the habit of giving a full account of the money in the treasury. Jesus rebuked him, saying they had the "*poor with them always.*" First things first. Jesus would soon be gone from them and Mary did what she could for the moment. The incident added fuel to the fire in Judas' heart to betray Jesus. Jesus' popularity was too much for the jealous priests who probably had spies among the group. They were so envious they wanted to kill both Jesus and Lazarus.

F. Wednesday: a day of rest

None of the Gospels record any events that happened during the daylight hours of Wednesday. The day may very well have been spent in rest with his dearest friends.

G. Thursday: the upper room experience (John 13)

Before being delivered into the hands of the Jews, Jesus desired to meet with his apostles in an intimate gathering. The Passover feast, the Jewish festival that celebrated their national deliverance from Egypt, afforded an opportune time for such a meeting. Thursday was the day of preparation on which Jewish families made plans for an evening fellowship meal. About mid-afternoon the Passover lamb was slain and all things for the evening meal made ready. Earlier, Jesus had made such plans for this small family of friends in Jerusalem. The upper room in which they gathered presents the most beautifully tender and tenderly beautiful scene that ever happened in all the Bible. Here, God incarnate condescended to the lowliest of human services for that day—to perform a slave's chore—by washing someone's dirty feet. Jesus chose this opportunity to vividly demonstrate how they had greatly misunderstood citizenship in the kingdom of heaven.

1. The highway to honor is by the lowly road of service.

Up to the very last hour, the disciples had been pushing and jostling for positions of honor in the upcoming kingdom.[21] Salome, the mother of James and John, had interceded openly for her sons to have the highest ranking offices next to Jesus. Jesus replied that positions of honor were not his to give because such honor could only be awarded by the Father whose judgment would be based on the extent one suffered for righteousness. He called this *a baptism of suffering*, similar to the one he would soon endure. Suffering unto death for righteousness sake would be God's criteria for determining greatness.

*This is not a critical work, therefore the reader is referred to the many critical works for any questions concerning the differences in these narratives.

Such jostling for prestigious offices in the kingdom gave rise to much envy and jealously among the disciples. Sadly, it is still around despite the graphic lessons taught by Jesus in this upper room.

Knowing how badly the disciples had misunderstood the nature of the kingdom and how slow they had been to learn, Jesus laid careful plans to provide the proper setting for correcting this grave error in their thinking. In his planning for this last greatly needed lesson, Jesus provided water, a basin and a towel to wash the disciples' feet—*but no servant for the lowly task.* Providing a slave for chores as this was normal for their culture. Only a slave washed others' feet.

Jesus knew that washing the disciples' feet would embarrass them, but if they could not humble themselves to perform the lowliest needs for others, they would not be prepared for the true nature of the kingdom. As citizens of the new kingdom they would be considered by many as the "offscouring of all things." [22] If the disciples were not made aware of the true nature of service required to bring the good news of salvation into the world, they would utterly fail in their mission. The lesson still holds true. The "upper room experience" was a critical moment in the disciple's instruction.

2. The Lord and Master washes his servant's feet.

The twelve were shocked when Jesus stooped to wash their feet. While they were fully aware of the need for this service, not one of them had volunteered to wash the feet of their friends; neither did anyone expect it from the other. But if any one should do it, *they felt it certainly must not be their Lord.*

One can only guess what thoughts Judas had when Jesus knelt before him. Was he thinking what a pathetic and shameful Messiah Jesus would make? If he had any second thoughts about what he had contracted to do with the High Priests, now, since Jesus had assumed the role of a slave, he knew he was right. Would he grovel himself like this if he were the true Messiah? He was absolutely convinced his bargain with the priests was right. He would do it.

Peter, too, was observing all this with serious misgivings. When Jesus finally arrived before him with his basin of water, he strenuously objected, stating emphatically: "*Thou shall never wash my feet.*" Jesus in equally emphatic terms replied: "*If I wash thee not, thou hast no part with me.*" [23] Not able to bear this thought, Peter told him to at least wash him as the law had said, "Both his hands and his head." Jesus now made certain that they did not take his actions to mean an act of the law for ceremonious cleansing. He told them, with one exception, of course, that they were already clean by faith in his word. His actions, therefore, had nothing to do with that. He then proceeded to tell them the real meaning behind his lowly service.

"*You call me Master and Lord: and ye say well; for so I am. If I then, your Lord and Master, have washed your feet; ye also ought to wash one another's feet. For I have given you an example, that ye should do as I have done to you,*" explaining that the servant was never greater than his master.[24]

Why is it that Jesus could stoop to perform such a lowly service while the disciples could not? The answer lies within the text. Jesus *knew who he was, understood the nature of his mission, and knew to whom he had to return.* Jesus knew that all authority had been placed in his hands by the father. They did not. Knowing these things, Jesus did not feel threatened in his position. He felt that the lowliest act of love offered a wonderful opportunity to glorify God. Although they knew the need for their feet to be washed, the disciples felt such lowly service was beneath them; therefore they were intimidated by Jesus' action and felt insecure.

Lowly services will likely convey such feelings if a disciple does not know the three vital things in John 13:3 which empowered Jesus to accept the lowliness of service to a fellowman. These three things are: *(1) "Jesus knowing that the Father had given all things into his hands," (2) "and that he was come from God," (3) "and went to God. . ."*

Knowing this about himself, he had no problem with this: "*He riseth from supper, and laid aside his garments; and took a towel and girded himself. After that he poureth water into a basin, and began to wash the disciples' feet, and to wipe them with the towel wherewith he was girded.*" In these verses we find the essential power to accomplish the lowliest tasks without embarrassment: *knowing who we are and the true nature of our calling.*

3. Jesus did not want Judas to be lost.

Jesus makes one last appeal to Judas in the upper room to believe in him to the very end. However, if Judas failed to repent when given this last chance, *it was necessary to rid the atmosphere of Judas' presence.* It was Jesus' desire to lay his heart bare to the small group in a most intimate manner. They cannot enter into the tender spirit of such communion unless there is utter support from the entire group. Besides, a traitor could not appreciate such tenderness as prevailed in this hallowed moment. Jesus was fully aware that the hour had come for Judas to betray him. Judas is reclining at the table very near Jesus. Some have pointed out that he sat in the seat of honor next to him. Even though Jesus knew murder was in his heart, still he offered him the bread of the sop. Upon doing this, Jesus said, "*What thou doest, do quickly.*" It seems Jesus was offering Judas a last chance to restore himself to faith, *or else to please leave.* Judas chose to follow through with his diabolical plan—the kiss of betrayal and death.

4. The darkness that Judas entered.

The text says that Judas "*went immediately out; and it was night.*" There is something very cryptic here in the word "night." The real night that Judas went out into was *the dark night of his soul.* Darkness had triumphed over him and flooded his mind. Each step that Judas took down the stairs from the upper room was a step further down into the pit of degradation. He was committed now to the evil deed he had been nurturing in his heart for some time. Satan had not only entered his heart, but was now given permission to dwell there. Judas is now Satan's servant as he is in full control of the man.

Now that Judas was gone, the room was no longer defiled. Jesus can get on with laying his heart bare to those who love him. What follows is absolute, undefiled, sweet fellowship. Although they need the lessons desperately, the Master begins to teach them things they cannot fully grasp. Jesus used the departure of Judas as a foundation on which to begin his instruction about his departure from them. "*Now is the Son of Man glorified, and God is glorified in him.*" Although a dark mystery at the moment, John knew well by the time he wrote his gospel what Jesus meant by his glorification. But if his glorification would take him away from them, they must remember that the most important lesson of all for them was to love one another.

This, he said, was a new commandment he was giving them. Love was nothing new. It was in the law that they should love God with all their heart, and to love their neighbor as themselves. But the new commandment of love that Jesus was emphasizing is revealed in this phrase: "*As I have loved you.*" The new commandment was to love each other as God loved them, i.e. to the lowliest of service and even unto death (Rev. 2:10).

To love one another to the point of becoming each's slave was unheard of in the world. There is nothing too demeaning, Jesus says, that a disciple can refuse to do for another if there is a true need. Difficult to receive as it was, Peter sat the pace by bowing in receptive attitude. They learned their lesson well for it was said of them later, "*Behold how they loved one another.*" Jesus told the disciples they could not follow him in his glorification at the moment. Much was yet needed to be done. They were not to resist his arrest and get themselves killed. He said they would follow later, but not at the moment. Peter

wondered about this and promptly asked the question: *"Lord, why cannot I follow thee now? I will lay down my life for thy sake."* That is exactly what Jesus did not want him to do at the moment. Peter thought he knew himself, but he didn't. He knew he would fight for Jesus to the death; he proved it later in Gethsemane when he drew his sword and smote the servant of the High Priest, severing his ear. Jesus knew things Peter did not know. The kingdom was not to be an earthly kingdom and established by the sword. Jesus would not lead them in a coup against the Romans. So Peter must put away his sword. This left him severely frustrated, an emotion which later that evening motivated his denial of the Lord three times, *the third time with an oath*. Later, it grieved him bitterly.

No, the disciples were not ready to follow Jesus now. They were unprepared to receive the kingdom in the way it would soon come. There was much more work to do. The way into the kingdom had to be opened first by the Pioneer blazing the trail before them. *"I go to prepare a place for you,"* Jesus said. He had to finish the atonement via the cross before the gospel of the kingdom could be preached. Before they could follow, the disciples had to wait for the cross and resurrection to receive the atonement and have their faith perfected. When Jesus said on the cross, *"It is finished,"* he only meant *the way of preparation* which his ministry and death had accomplished.

In John 14, the Lord promised the disciples the Comforter, the Holy Ghost who, he said, would come in his name. The Holy Spirit would bring the same comfort to the new church that Jesus gave the disciples when he had been alive with them. In future situations where they would seem to be confounded by the enemy, the Holy Spirit would reveal to them at the moment what they should say. He would also empower them to cast out demons under all circumstances, just as Jesus had done in his ministry, provided they prayed for all things they needed in Jesus' name. John 15 speaks of the new loving relationship between Jesus and each disciple: *"I am the vine and ye are the branches,"* Jesus explained. The idea was, that as the vine supplied the branches with all the necessary nutrients to bear the essential fruit seed for reproduction, so their close and abiding relationship in Jesus would make it possible for them to bear fruit in the kingdom of heaven. The branch could not bear fruit of itself without the vine. The vital nutrient that flowed through the vine from God was love. This meant each branch not only had a vital relationship to the vine, but it bore a loving relationship with the other branches. Each branch received love from Christ, the vine. Each also had a relationship of love for each other. Each branch bore the same kind of fruit and it has been so for all true disciples down through the centuries.*

In chapter sixteen, he forewarns the disciples of persecution. The time will come, he said, *"that whosoever that killeth you will think that he doeth God service."* (Jno. 16:2) While the kingdom was not to be established by the sword, those opposing it would not hesitate to use the sword against its citizens. Be prepared, he is telling them, to lose everything, if necessary, to gain eternal life. Satan hates righteousness and all those who serve it. All entering the kingdom must be ready to suffer for righteousness sake. *"He that liveth Godly in Christ Jesus, shall suffer persecution." (II Tim 3:12)* But they are to know also that strength would be given them through prayer, and that great joy would be with them. After these things, John records the beautiful prayer by Jesus in chapter seventeen. In this prayer he prays for all the new relationships the disciples were entering and asks that they be sanctified through the word. He had given them his word while he was with them. The Holy Spirit would continue to give it to them after he departed. By remaining faithful to the word of God, they would be able to overcome all things. While they were not fully ready for such lofty and nontraditional instruction, the resurrection would mature them dramatically.

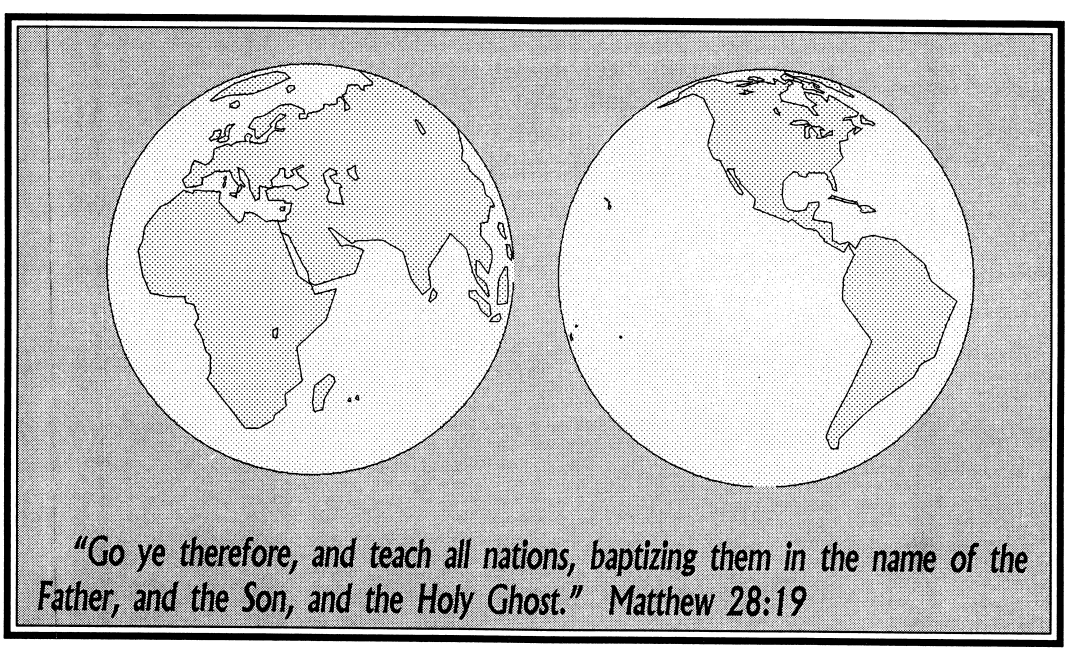
*The branches are disciples, not future denominational churches as some have claimed.

References

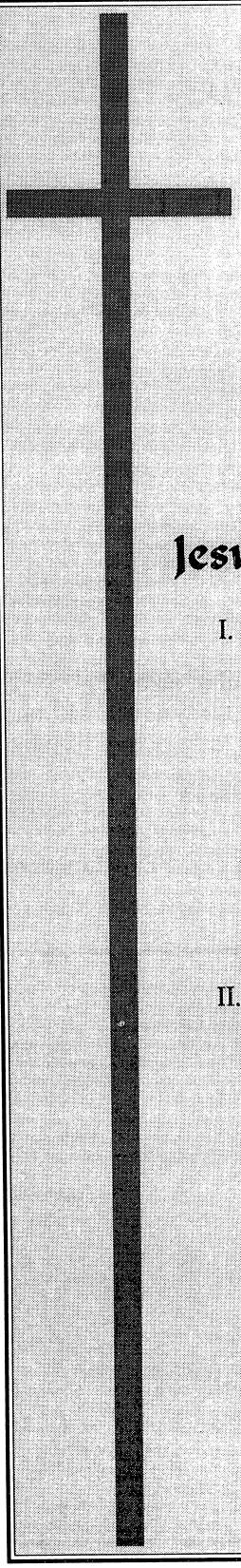
1. Luke 19:42-4
2. Luke 23:28ff.
3. John 12:1
4. Matthew 21
5. John 2:4; 7:30; Mark 14:41
6. Stewart, p. 45, *Op. cit.,* page 27
7. Genesis 3:15
8. I Corinthians 5
9. Matthew 21:13
10. John 2:21
11. Matthew 3:11-20
12. Matthew 21:23
13. Matthew 21:25-26
14. II Corinthians 3:14
15. Ephesians 5:23ff.
16. Colossians 3
17. Exodus 3:6, 15
18. Matthew 9:13
19. James 2:10
20. I Corinthians 6
21. Matthew 20:20-28; Mark 9:34; Luke 9:46; 22:24
22. II Corinthians 4:13
23. John 13:8
24. John 13:13-16

Questions for Chapter Nineteen

1. Which are the various feasts of John 2:13; 5:1; 10:22; 7:2?
2. Discuss the events in each day of the last 8 days of Jesus life.
3. What was the significance of Jesus' entering Jerusalem on the foal of an ass?
4. What did Jesus mean when he said: "Destroy this Temple and in three days I will raise it up"? Give extended circumstances of this meaning in regard to the place of worship under the New Testament order.
5. Discuss the purpose behind the cursing of the fig tree.
6. Which is the greatest commandment? Why?
7. What were the disciples preoccupied with concerning the coming of the new kingdom?
8. What are the lessons in the upper room events?



"Go ye therefore, and teach all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and the Son, and the Holy Ghost." Matthew 28:19



Outline for Chapter Twenty

Jesus Arrested and Condemned

I. Gethsemane
   A. The pitifulness at Gethsemane
   B. Peter's denial
   C. Why did Judas turn traitor?
      1. Was lust for money his principal motive?
      2. Was fear a contributing factor?
      3. Did jealousy play a role in Judas' betrayal?
      4. Was it to force Jesus to immediately establish his kingdom?
      5. What really motivated Judas to betray Christ?
      6. Why was Judas so remorseful?

II. An Ecclesiastical and Civil Trial
   A. Five illegalities of Jesus' trial
   B. Jesus in civil court
      1. Pilate's big problem

EXCEPT A CORN OF WHEAT ...DIE, IT ABIDETH ALONE.

Chapter Twenty

Jesus Arrested and Condemned

Jno. 12:24; Mt. 26:63-68; 27; Mk. 14, 15; Lk. 23:13-25, 32-34a; Jno 19

The winepress of pain, our Lord must tread-;
An awesome suffering in our stead;
Sweat as of blood pours from his brow,
But he never looks back from the chosen plow.
A kiss of death from a make-believe friend,
Delivers him to an arresting fiend,
Who fiendishly gloats to see him bound—
Later, fiendishly lies when he cannot be found.
—Anonymous

1. GETHSEMANE

"*Verily, verily, I say unto you, Except a corn of wheat fall into the ground and die, it abideth alone: but if it die, it bringeth forth much fruit. He that loveth his life shall lose it; and he that hateth his life in this world shall keep it unto life eternal. If any man serve me, let him follow me; and where I am, there shall also my servant be: if any man serve me, him will my Father honour.*" (Jno.12:24-26)

After midnight and the singing of a hymn, our Lord arose from the Passover table and led his disciples from the upper room. Down the narrow stairs on the side of the building, they walked, and into the shadowy streets of the city of David. The streets are now quiet after joyously celebrating the annual Passover. Little do these slumbering families know this is the Passover at which the Lamb of God will be slain, opening a flowing fountain of forgiving blood for the entire world.

Weary of the strain of the week's events, the small band trudged along the cobblestone streets and finally through one of the huge entrance gates in the gray stone wall surrounding the worshipping city. Down the valley they continued, crossing the brook Kidron, ending their night trek at a familiar small garden plot. This was Gethsemane which lay on the lower slopes of the Mount of Olives.

Jesus knew this place well as a place of solitude, prayer and meditation. In the early morning hours, Jesus leaves most of his disciples at the edge of the garden, but takes Peter, James and John deeper inside. There he intends to unfold his heart to God in this moment of trial. Even these three, "the inner circle," are left a short distance away from himself.

The crushing burden of the cross must be borne alone, "For *every one must bear his own burden.*"[1] No one has ever fathomed the weight on our Lord's soul as he disappeared in the dark shadows of the old olive trees. There, in awful pain of heart, Jesus entered a private closet of intimate prayer with God—the Garden of Prayer.

Among the shadows in lonely humility of spirit, our Lord prostrated himself be-

fore the throne of the Almighty in the lowliest position possible, burying his face upon the ground. There he lay in unknown agony and uttered a childlike petition in intense earnestness of heart: "*O my father, if it be possible, let this cup pass from me.*" One must not linger long here in the privacy of this sacred place. Little comment is needed, or should be given here. The same is equally true for the cross which will soon follow. The moment is too private, too intimate, too reverent. But there is something very unusual about the burden on Jesus' heart there in the shadows of the valley of an inhuman death. Many have faced their untimely end bravely, even with song. The early martyrs sang hymns while awaiting their bouts with savage beasts in the Roman arena. Those in our century who met their death at the sinking of the Titanic went down singing, "Nearer My God To Thee." We are told the band played until the very end.

But these went through the awful waters to meet their Maker with minor burdens compared to our Lord. Jesus had upon his shoulders the burden of the sins of all creation. In war, some men have died very gallantly for others. Parents have rushed into flaming buildings without a second thought to save their children's lives, only to lose their own.

A. The pitifulness at Gethsemane

The pitifulness at Gethsemane lay in the fact that the innocent gift of heaven was lovingly taking upon himself the guilt of the entire world. Creeping upon him was the awful feeling of stark separation from God which only reached its climax when he was nailed to the cross. Unbearable pain and loneliness caused him to cry out while suspended from the cross by iron spikes, "M*y God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me*?" Jesus had never felt any separation from God before. It gave him a feeling of weakness and helplessness which the penitent sinner feels when he becomes suddenly conscious that his sins have cut him off from God and any hope. Jonah had a similar experience in the belly of the great fish. It was all this that made Jesus tremble at the cup from which he must drink. He was the innocent "*being made sin for us.*" *The innocent dying for the guilty.*[2] This burden drove him thrice to the rock of agony in indescribable prayer. Here we must quietly slip away — for we too, like Peter, James and John, or even those back near the garden entrance, are too much asleep to fathom the deep significance of the events. One thing we do know, he had the strength to say, "*Not what I will, but what thou wilt,*" **and we thank God for him.**[3]

Thus as it was, so is it always. Only those closest to Jesus can even begin to approach the depth of his spiritual agonizing over our sin, and even these do not fully understand. There was the Jewish world outside Gethsemane that was so busy being religious that it missed its own God who had walked incarnate before its very eyes, proving himself with indisputable miracles of compassion. Could this be equally true today in Christendom that is so busy celebrating Easter and Christmas and other of its religious holidays? There are still those who share Jesus' passion but these, much like most of his apostles, come only to Gethsemane's outer gates in understanding it. Thus, now, as then, most are left on the outer perimeter of the depth of the riches of the mercy of Christ; for only a few draw closer than this to the heart of God. *These few are those who love the unadulterated word of Jesus. They cheerfully give of their means to support it, attend faithfully the weekly communion services and attend weekly prayer meetings.* These have an "inner garden" invitation to be with the Master, but it never occurs to them to act as "superior Christians." Even the few who draw closer, like those apostles in inner Gethsemane, still fall asleep during the culture crisis in today's church, oblivious to its drift into a sea of paganism.

B. Peter's Denial

Diabolical deeds of evil have been committed since Cain. And there are deadly deeds committed out of momentary insanity caused by intense passion—crimes of passion they are called. However, our courts hold us accountable most for the cool, calculated, premeditated, crimes that are carefully planned and precisely executed. Peter's sin of denying Jesus with an oath is awesome. It was not, however, premeditated nor planned, nor more than we may well have done given the same circumstances. It was a response from his on-the-spot frustration prompted by a misunderstanding of Jesus' actions.

Peter thought he had more faith than he actually had. He was willing to die for the Master, but this was on the condition that he could die defending him with the sword. He proved his sincerity in Gethsemane by promptly severing an ear from the servant of the arresting High Priest. Not for one moment should we believe Peter was only aiming for an ear. This man was spared his head only by a quick duck. But, then, the Lord told Peter to put up his sword. And when this nervy apostle understood that Jesus intended to offer no defense, but meekly surrender to the arresting soldiers, he was put asea by an overwhelming frustration. Peter at this time has no full grasp on the baptism of suffering for Christ and Christianity. Many years later he has acquired by experience a sublime understanding of the nature of Christian suffering and writes his first beautiful epistle on the subject. But these are early hours before the cross and prior to his baptism in the Holy Spirit. Peter could not rationalize his mere standing by and permitting these men to bind the one he loved most in the world. Not being allowed to defend themselves, intensely frustrated Peter. This made him fear for his own life. Thus, Peter's subsequent denial was not spawned at all by the same nature as Judas' treachery. Judas' deed was diabolical in that it was premeditated and selfishly motivated.

C. Why did Judas turn traitor?

Many have labored to find various reasons for Judas acting as he did. What may have motivated his awful deed?

1. Was lust for money his principal motive?

Some believe that a large dose of covetousness in Judas' character made him betray Jesus. No doubt, Judas had a terrible craving for money because he pilfered the treasury bag which had been entrusted to him by the disciples. In his frank style, John called him a thief.[4] While this is awesomely serious and certainly a factor that weighed heavily in favor of Judas' decision, some have expressed doubts that it was *the only factor,* and at most not the determining one.* Here are two questions they ask: If this was a heavy deciding issue with Judas, why did he not bargain much more heavily with the High Priest? Why did he sell Jesus out so cheaply when he was number one on the High Priest's "Most Wanted List?"

2. Was fear a contributing factor?

Did Judas see doom coming and abandon "a sinking ship?" Did he see that the only way to save himself from crucifixion was to aid the Sanhedrin and support them in the arrest of our Lord? Some point out that terrible fear could have been a factor that weighed heavily upon Judas and prompted his betrayal of Jesus.

---

*James Stewart has a good pro and con discussion on some of Judas' suggested motives. James S. Stewart, *The Life and Teaching of Jesus Christ, p. 151ff.* Op. cit., see page 27.

3. Did jealousy play a role in Judas' betrayal?

Some have suggested that jealousy was behind Judas' betrayal. To support their theory these point out that Judas seemed to be a very ambitious man. They gather this from his name. The name "Iscariot" tells us he was of Kerioth, a small town in Judea. He was the only apostle from this province. Jews from this area were usually much more erudite than their rustic Galilean brethren to the north. This may have been the reason Judas was chosen to handle the purse strings for the group.*

Did Judas suffer the pangs of jealousy because he never made Jesus' "first team" with Peter, James and John? Did he feel Jesus was discriminatory against him, a person with obviously better qualifications? Being a passionate man, this might have inflamed him. Perhaps this drove him to become a leader in criticism—remember his objections to the costly perfume poured on Jesus?[5] Did jealousy drive Judas into reticence, and finally cause him to act from an urge to "get even" with the whole group. Perhaps, *but jealousy alone does not seem to be sufficient for such a crime as this.*

4. Was it to force Jesus to immediately establish his kingdom?

De Quincey, a man with quite a mark of inventiveness, offered an explanation quite popular in some circles. It says that Judas was acting from a motive to compel Jesus to quickly establish a Judaists throne. This tends to create a moral allowance for Judas that takes the biting edge off his diabolical deed. This would make Judas act from the principle motive of impatience. According to this, Judas could not just sit idle and watch Jesus foolishly cast aside a glorious opportunity to establish the new kingdom. *But such an answer for Judas' betrayal of Jesus does not even come close to adequately explaining his treachery.*

This position lets Judas off the hook. If impatience was the only motive for Judas' actions, he would still be considered a close friend of Jesus in Gethsemane when he identified him to the arresting guards with that hypocritical kiss! A man whose only sin was impatience would hardly fulfill all the hard evidence given against Judas in the Bible.

The Gospel does not give one word that tones down the fact that he was a thief who sold his best friend for a pittance. Both Luke and Peter relate Judas' ultimate fate.[6] Jesus said, "W*oe to that man by whom the Son of man is betrayed! Good were it for that man if he had never been born.*"[7]

5. What really motivated Judas to betray Jesus?

What really made Judas do something he so utterly hated himself for afterward? A combination of the things in the above paragraph entered into Judas' final decision to betray his Lord. Most of all, there was his unwillingness to immediately dispose of the ugly negative emotions he felt welling up inside him. Here was a man chosen by Jesus to enter the kingdom of God, who allowed himself to take money from their treasury bag for personal use. At first, he very likely made an attempt to justify these actions in his heart. Perhaps he promised himself he would restore all. This is so typical of such human behavior in similar circumstances.

But the opportunity never presented itself to Judas. He only sank deeper and deeper as each pilfering of the bag made it easier for him to do it again. He ignored his conscience.

Suppression of the conscience is a dangerous thing. One must ask himself if

*See Clovis Chappell, *Meet These Men,* (Abingdon press, 1956). Note the sermon on The Man Who Gave Way to Hate, p. 146

Judas was daily plagued by secret thoughts believing Jesus knew what he was doing. He knew the Lord would not only disapprove, he would be intensely saddened. Tolerating daily abuse to one's conscience brings misery and a feeling of low esteem—*unless ugly deeds are rationalized.* Rationalization which ignores a tinge of light lingering in the heart, eventually gives way to jealousy. Jealousy slowly turns into spite, and spite into hate, and hate boils over into hell.

John said that at the last Passover supper Satan entered into Judas. This was while the disciples were assembled with Jesus in a most hallowed hour. Being gathered in a hallowed worshipful assembly gives no absolute immunity against the influence of Satan. One person may leave a worship assembly feeling he has been in the spiritual presence of the Lord while another who sat next to him utters upon leaving, "*I didn't get a thing out of that.*" Both could be very true experiences.[8] Judas had left the door open for Satan. Some souls,disgruntled about something, may enter the church services with a similar invitation for Satan.

With pleas of mercy and warnings of judgment, God gives us last minute opportunities for repentance just as Jesus did for Judas. When Jesus told Judas to make up his mind in a hurry, it brought Judas' sudden departure. The other disciples thought he left on a mission of compassion.[9] By calling Judas' hand, Judas knew definitely that Jesus had clearly read his intentions. It was too late, for it does not cause a single ripple in Judas' calloused conscience. By this late moment Judas' heart was so hardened a last minute plea was less than useless. However, God cares for every soul's destiny to the very end. Judas was now completely and irretrievably under the control of the prince of darkness. So the deed was done.

6. Why was Judas so remorseful?

One final remark about Judas should be made. Why was Judas not supremely elated after all was accomplished? Why did he not wring his hands in mirthful glee? Why did not the thirty pieces of silver bring a broad grin of satisfaction as he slipped them gingerly into his pocket? Surely his conscience would not give him any trouble for something he wanted to do so badly. But the action of conscience is a very unique operation. It's response cannot always be predicted. It may remain quiet for a while, sometimes even years, but sooner or later it can rise up with such vindictiveness of remorse that one cannot live any longer without doing something to correct the problem. Judas had to deal with a conscience that cast his innermost soul into the depths of mental and spiritual torment.

While he may earlier have thought a sweet gleeful sense of superiority and accomplishment would fill his soul, only despair and damnation of self was felt. No gloating, no good feeling about the deed filled his heart, but only remorseful guilt welled up inside which clung tenaciously every single second of his existence. One may cry out with utter despair and groanings like Lady Macbeth for the spot to go out—but the guilt refuses to go away.

Thus the bitter end of Judas comes as he seeks a lonely spot to take his own life by hanging himself. What a horrible fate awaits those who wallow in guilt, low self esteem and stubbornly refuse to ask Jesus for forgiveness. If Judas had only asked Jesus to forgive him, Jesus would have

forgiven him fully. But Judas could not face Jesus, he could not permit Jesus to take away his unbearable burden. This led to his ruin.

The same is true for each of us. No matter how awful the sin, how deliberate, nor how frequently it has stained our past, *if we come to Jesus with it*, he will forgive and we can live with him and with ourselves once again. Judas could not bear to face the innocent One against whom he had sinned. This is so often true. But however hurtful it is, it cannot hurt like attempting to bear sin alone in our hearts. Tons of tranquilizers can not remove a whit of guilt from a pestilent conscience. Remember Judas Iscariot!

11. AN ECCLESIASTICAL AND CIVIL TRIAL

The Sanhedrin now moves to arrest Jesus and put into action its calloused plans for destroying him. After his seizure in the garden by the Temple guards, Jesus was taken immediately to the High Priest emeritus, Annas.[10] Annas had been the High Priest from A.D. 6 to 15 and several of his family had followed in his steps. He was a clever and powerful statesman with tremendous influence. While it was his son-in-law, Caiphas, who was officially the High Priest at this time, Annas retained much influence and used it well in a cunning way to control the Sanhedrin. It may have been this man who polluted the Temple by selling merchandise within the Temple courts for personal gain. After a brief questioning period, Annas sent Jesus on to his son-in-law, Caiphas.

The Sanhedrin could not legally meet before sunrise, but in their mad rush to have all things finished before the onset of the Sabbath, the law was set aside for a quick hearing and a verdict of "guilty." Word of Jesus' arrest must have been passed rapidly to the members of the Sanhedrin even at this early hour. These met with Annas and proceeded to try Jesus illegally before dawn. Their findings would only have to be approved by a brief legal meeting of the ecclesiastical court after sunrise. It is odd how men can stick with some legalistic formalities to make other illegal proceedings appear acceptable.[11]

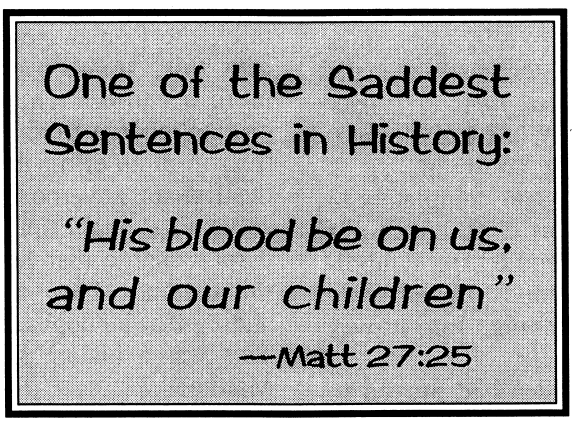
How religious hypocrites can be! The method for condemnation was to get Jesus to talk about his teaching. Through much talk they could twist and turn the things he said to make it appear he was guilty of something. They were questioning Jesus but he refused to say much. In reply our Lord tersely said, "*I spake openly to the world; I ever taught in the synagogue, and in the temple, whither the Jews always resort; in secret I have said nothing.*" [12]

Jesus was simply telling them that he had nothing else to say than what they had already heard. So, their first barrage attack to find a legal excuse to kill him failed.

The second onslaught failed also when witnesses Caiphas had brought into the assembly could not agree in their lame testimony. They tried this a second time; still the evidence was obviously phony.[13] Next, Caiphas would try to intimidate Jesus. He decided to personally ask Jesus if he were the Christ. Straight forward the question came: "*Art thou the Christ, the Son of the Blessed*?" No other question could be asked that could serve better to incriminate Jesus on capital grounds of punishment. That is what he wanted so badly, so he confronted Jesus with the capital question.

This time Jesus replied with a terse "*I am,*" adding that in the finality of all things

they would be judged by him. One can only imagine the indignation they felt when Jesus said that they would see him return "*sitting on the right hand of power, and coming in the clouds of heaven.*"[14] They were exultant at his reply. It gave them what they wanted so badly. Caiphas yelled blasphemy! And it would have been, had it not been the truth. All agreed this was blasphemy, which supplied them with their capital charge. They passed sentence immediately and began to mock and treat him with vulgar contempt. Can you imagine a supreme court official spitting upon the person they have just condemned in a hurried predawn kangaroo court? Such actions speak for themselves as to the quality of justice Jesus received. Note now some illegalities in this mock trial of justice.



A. Five illegalities of Jesus' ecclesiastical trial

Illegality 1. *Those who sought to put Jesus to death by any means possible were the same ones who served to hear his case.*

Illegality 2. *The trial had no charge against the accused at its commencement.* Crooked evidence had to be sought for later as a part of the trial. The court was legally bound to dismiss the case after the witnesses could not agree. However, they continued to rush the trial and were determined to get the verdict they sought.

Illegality 3. *The judge trying the case should have disqualified himself.* For that matter, both Annas and Caiphas were ringleaders on the side of the prosecution. Note the predetermination in their hearts to put Jesus to death: ". . . *it is expedient for us, that one man should die for the people, and that the whole nation perish not.*" (Jno. 11:50)

Illegality 4. *Where were the witnesses for the defense?* None were provided because they were determined to put Jesus to death.

Illegality 5. *The trial was conducted before daybreak in a heated rush.* The blatant hypocrisy of having a quick hearing of the court after sunrise to verify the night's illegal proceedings showed the depth of their acidulous envy. There was a law that said that twenty hours had to pass before a pronouncement of the death penalty could be made. There was also a prohibition against hearing capital cases on the day before a Sabbath or feast day. All these laws were ignored in the rush to put an innocent Man to death.

And why? Why the rush? Because it is apparent that any delay as the law called for could work in Jesus' favor. He was a very popular man among the people on the streets of Jerusalem. The events of only four days ago proved this to be a fact when many wanted to make Jesus a king.

B. Jesus in civil court

After the guilty verdict was pronounced, Jesus was rushed on to Pilate because the death sentence had to be confirmed by a Roman official. Being a vassal state of Rome, the Jewish court was permitted to try its own people, but it was not permitted to inflict the death sentence. This was reserved for Roman authority alone. Jesus, after being found guilty of religious crimes by the Sanhedrin, was sent to Pilate, the Roman governor of Judea, *for a civil trial* and to be put to death. Pilate had the right to overrule the Jewish court and set a person free. Jesus' fate was completely in Pilate's hands. His effort to rid himself of the guilt of innocent blood by the symbolism of washing his hands is not very sensible, morally speaking, but it was "politically correct."

The province of Judea had proved to be one of the most difficult ones in Tiberius' empire to manage peacefully. The area was given to constant civil and religious discontent, which Pilate dealt with swiftly and harshly. The stern measures he took to keep the peace would have made Pilate register low in any popularity poll of the day. He had no love for the Jews, nor they for him. Pilate had openly taunted and insulted the Jews by flaunting images of Caesar as a god. This he did by having them paraded through the streets of the holy city of David. On other occasions he had been quick to shed blood to keep the stubborn Jews under tight control. Ordinarily, nothing would have caused negotiations to take place between the leaders of Judaism and Pilate, but sin has great power to align itself with any force needed to accomplish a selfish purpose, even a foe. A common enemy makes strange bedfellows. Caiphas and his henchmen needed Pilate at the moment, so they proceeded to make the best effort they could to win a concession of capital punishment from him.

When the Sanhedrin officers confront Pilate for a condemnation of Jesus, the governor promptly demands the charges against him. They had earlier charged Jesus with blasphemy in their court, but this was irrelevant to Pilate. They needed a civil crime that carried capital punishment in a Roman court. One can see the consternation on the lawyers faces as they scramble for a charge and finally reply, "*If he were not a malefactor, we would not have delivered him to thee.*"[15] Naturally, the Roman governor could not accept this, so he pressed for something more specific. They then changed the original charge from blasphemy to one of treason in an effort to get the attention of the Roman governor.[16] This would make Jesus a national criminal based on a slanderous charge that he was a perverter of the nation. They strengthened this by adding that he opposed taxation by Rome. This was a blatant lie as can be seen in Matthew 22:21.

Finally, they said Jesus claimed to be a king. Jesus' royalty was never intended to be national but spiritual. They knew Jesus posed no threat to Rome, but they wanted to take advantage of Pilate's ignorance in this matter and motivate him.

1. Pilate's big problem.

When these civil charges were flung before Pilate, the governor was pressed to give Jesus a private hearing. Unbiased by the personal envy the Jews nourished against this composed Galilean, the governor could find no legal grounds for putting our Lord to death. Pilate was striving to acquit an innocent man and avoid making the most momentous decision ever rendered by any public official upon the earth. The governor was accustomed to having the common criminal stand before him, but this man was no ordinary man. Pilate recognized this. Certainly there was nothing he could see nor detect that was worthy of the capital charges the Jewish court had brought against him. He returned to the accusers

and announced that there was nothing worthy of death in Jesus.

This was not what the legal assassins wanted to hear. They began to stir and grow loud. Pilate saw at once that this could quickly get out of hand. It remains a mystery why a stern disciplinarian as Pilate suddenly became so uneasy at the likelihood of a Jewish riot. When they had rioted before, he quickly dealt with it sharply and decisively.

On this occasion, however, Jerusalem was filled with thousands of Jewish pilgrims who had come to observe the great Passover occasion. Religious fervor was at a peak. A riot now would be no ordinary one. It could lead to tremendous bloodshed during the holy season. Rome would not like this. Pilate had many pressures weighing heavily in his mind at the moment. The best thing it seemed was to find an out, a compromise of some sort. He listened to the Jews enforce their charges against Jesus saying, "*He stirs up the people, teaching throughout all Judea, beginning from Galilee to this place.*" This gave Pilate a clue for what he had hoped. Herod, tetrarch of Galilee, was in town and Jesus, a Galilean, would be under his jurisdiction. He could be sent first to him in a lower court. Perhaps he could escape having to deal with this precarious situation. This was a mark of political brilliance on Pilate's part, but, unfortunately, it did not accomplish his purpose. Jesus arrived at Herod's court. One may wonder why Herod ever gave him an audience. The petty king's curiosity had been kindled by the rumors he had heard, so his interrogation was solely out of sport and to satisfy his personal curiosity. He mocked our Lord despitefully and returned him to Pilate with no verdict at all.

Here are two politicians attempting to evade being the target of possible repercussions. Pilate was forced to complete the ungodly drama himself. Once again, Pilate proposes a way to spare the life of our Lord. He hopes he can satisfy the blood thirst of the Jewish lawyers by having Jesus scourged, a pitiful flesh crushing, blood-bath beating to behold. Surely this would abate their wrath. He would then let him go. [17]

It was a spineless attempt at compromise which was beneath the dignity and justice of his office. But the Jews would have none of it. Pilate was trying to occupy a "no man's land" between pleasing the crowd and fulfilling his responsibility to Jesus. Naturally, he did neither. His offer only incensed the crowd further and elicited shouts of: "*Crucify him! Crucify him!*" The uproar drowned out all reasoning. Regardless of the uproar, Pilate made one last effort to circumvent the diabolical deed they were intent on doing. He suggested that he honor an old tradition to humor the Jews.

The Romans had released each year at the Passover some Jew held in prison. For this occasion he chose an unsavory character named Barabbas who was already convicted of a great crime and stood him beside the benign and meek Jesus. Pilate then asks them to choose which of these two he should free. Surely, he thought, he could spark a feeling of justice and fairness.

Pilate was in mid stream, desperately clutching at any straw in an attempt to free Jesus. Yet, the bloodthirsty mob hardly heard him. Someone shouted, "*If thou let this man go, thou art not Caesar's friend.*"[18] Pilate really wanted to free Jesus, but the price of risking a complaint against himself to Rome was too much. If it meant risking a personal summons to Rome to answer charges that threatened his position, Jesus was expendable. Pilate finally capitulated. When he publicly refused to accept personal guilt for the crucifixion of Jesus, the Jews quickly accepted it for themselves in the most horrifying self-incriminating words ever spoken for the greatest wrong of the ages. "*His blood be on us and on our children.*" (Matt. 27:25).

References

1. Matthew 22:36
2. II Corinthians 5:21
3. Mark 14:36
4. John 12:6
5. John 12:4-5
6. Acts 1:25
7. Mark 14:21
8. John 13:27
9. John 13:29
10. John 18:3
11. Cp. Matthew 27:57 with 27:1
12. Cp. John 18:20 with Mark 14:60
13. Mark 14:59
14. Mark 14:62
15. John 18:30
16. Luke 23:2
17. Luke 23:16
18. John 19:12

Supplementary Readings

Bishop, Jim. *The Day Christ Died.* New York: Harper & Brothers, 1957

Green, Michael. *The Empty Cross of Jesus.* Downers Grove, Ill. InterVarsity Press, 1984.

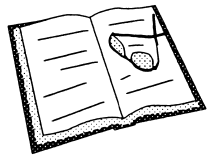
Hunter, A. M. *Jesus Lord and Saviour.* Grand Rapids, Mich., Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1976

Roper, Albert. *Did Jesus Rise from the Dead?* Grand Rapids, Mich., Zondervan Publishing House, 1965.

Questions for Chapter Twenty

1. Relate the events of our Lord's experience in the Garden of Gethsemane the night of his arrest until he was taken by the Jewish soldiers.
2. Discuss the possible motives that lay behind Judas' betrayal of the Lord.
3. Discuss the illegalities of Jesus' trial.
4. Discuss the problem that faced Pilate concerning the trial of Jesus.

—Read This—



And he took with him Peter and the two sons of Zebedee, and began to be sorrowful and very heavy. Then saith he unto them, My soul is exceeding sorrowful, even unto death: tarry ye here, and watch with me. And he went a little farther, and fell on his face, and prayed, saying, O my Father, if it be possible, let this cup pass from me: nevertheless not as I will, but as thou wilt. And he cometh unto the disciples, and findeth them asleep, and saith unto Peter, What, could ye not watch with me one hour? Watch and pray, that ye enter not into temptation: the spirit indeed is willing, but the flesh is weak. He went away again the second time, and prayed, saying, O my Father, if this cup may not pass away from me, except I drink it, thy will be done. And he came and found them asleep again: for their eyes were heavy. And he left them, and went away again, and prayed the third time, saying the same words. Then cometh he to his disciples, and saith unto them, Sleep on now, and take your rest: behold, the hour is at hand, and the Son of man is betrayed into the hands of sinners. Rise, let us be going: behold, he is at hand that doth betray me. —Matthew 26:37-46.

Outline for Chapter Twenty-one

Triumph Out of Defeat

I. The Agony of Gethsemane
   A. Why did Jesus doggedly pursue a resolute course to such a shameful and inglorious end?
      1. It certainly was not because he was overcome by the power of the enemy.
      2. Jesus was not a victim of vicious men who forced him to die.
      3. The humanity of Jesus cringed at the awesome suffering that awaited him.
   B. The most cruel punishment on earth
   C. The longest night
   D. Calvary
      1. This is the King of the Jews
      2. The cross: the ultimate indictment against sin
      3. The cross as; the revelation of God's love
   E. Post-resurrection appearances of Jesus
      1. Did the disciples really see Jesus after his resurrection?
      2. The resurrection is unimpeachable history
      3. Is the resurrection believable today?
      4. The resurrection affected a great change upon the disciples' lives
      5. Did the disciples merely invent the resurrection story?
      6. The resurrection of Jesus was assured before Jesus ever entered the world.
      7. The meaning of the resurrection
      8. Unbelievers disregard the facts

ALVARY'S BROW

Chapter Twenty-one

Triumph Out of Defeat

Matt. 16:21; 20:19; Mk. 9:31; Lu. 9:22

Vainly they watch his bed—Jesus my Savior!
Vainly they seal the dead—Jesus my Lord!
Up from the grave He arose,
With a mighty triumph o'er his foes;
He arose a Victor from the dark domain,
And He lives forever with his saints to reign:
He arose! He arose! Hallelujah! Christ Arose!
—Robert Lowry

1. THE AGONY OF GETHSEMANE

Much has been said about the rigors of Calvary. When we pause to discuss the passion of Jesus, it is very much like Moses standing in reverential awe at the burning bush, being directed by the holy Voice to remove his shoes, because he was standing on sacred ground. Gethsemane's garden, where Jesus agonized in prayer over the fires he must traverse in the following hours, is sacred indeed.

When approaching the closing moments of Christ upon the earth, a believer becomes quiet in heart as a deep reverence floods his mind. Jesus' entire evening has been extremely touching. The moments our Lord spent in the upper room at the last supper with his disciples, the last precious lessons he taught them, the heavy agonizing of our Lord in Gethsemane, and finally the cruelty of Calvary, all are unfathomable and precious to the Christian. It is something like what it may have been like to have taken a quiet stroll through the muted tabernacle of God just after the great curtain had been torn asunder by the hand of God, and viewing holy things never seen before, because such had been forbidden to human eyes.

So now we come to the end upon the bald brow of cruel Calvary, where for an awful, precious moment, time stood still for Jesus. Engulfed in pain and loneliness, he was made to feel the horrors of the ultimate catastrophe of a soul being *absolutely cut off from God.* A feeling of sheer hell must have closed in upon him at the cross, all because he was bearing the guilt of sins for the entire world, past, present and future.

A. Why did Jesus doggedly pursue a resolute course to such a shameful and inglorious end?

1. It certainly was not because he was overcome by the power of the enemy.

Earlier that night in Gethsemane, Jesus had informed Peter he could petition and receive of the Father twelve legions of angels for his defense. Later, at his inquiry, Pilate said to Jesus: "*Speakest thou not unto me? Knowest thou not that I have power to crucify thee, and have power to release thee?*" At this Jesus replied, "*Thou couldest have no power at all against me, except it were given thee from above; therefore he that delivereth me unto thee hath the greater sin.*"[1] No force upon the earth, including the diabolical cunning of Annas and Caiphas, the sellout by Judas, nor Pilate with all his legions of troops, were sufficient to force Jesus to be nailed to the cross.

Like Bryant penned in his famous Thanatopsis, Jesus did not go to his death as an unwilling slave *forced to the quarry.* Omnipotent Jesus submitted to Calvary knowing fully what awaited him there. He quite understood what he was doing, yet he refused to pray for the twelve legions of angels to defend himself. He who was being judged by Pilate, turned the tables on his judge when he reminded him with these words that his power was limited by the Almighty: "*Thou couldest have no power at all against me, except it be given thee from above . . . .*" These words remain as evidence that the judge of Jesus was rather being judged by Jesus.[2]

2. Jesus was not a victim of vicious men who forced him to die.

He voluntarily reclined upon the timbers of the cross to receive the spikes. He was a willing lamb that went humbly to the altar of sacrifice. He was both priest and sacrifice, fulfilling his previously planned atonement for the world's sins: "*The Son of Man came . . . to give his life a ransom for many.*"[3] John makes this point even clearer, stating: "*No man taketh it* [his life] *from me, but I lay it down of myself. I have power to lay it down, and I have power to take it up again . . . .*"[4] Jesus knew from the beginning of his mission that Calvary was towering ominously at the end of his ministry. He spoke frequently of his death, in Luke 9:22, Matthew 16:21, and many, many other places.

In loving ignorance, Peter rebuked Jesus for suggesting he must die in Jerusalem. As a close friend, he tried to persuade his Lord from even thinking about such an inglorious end to his ministry. However, the intense pain caused by Peter's suggestion that he need not die in Jerusalem was viewed by the Lord as a temptation straight from Satan. Jesus needed his best friend's support and comfort to carry out the atonement, not to counsel him against the agonies he must face to save us all.

The temptation to escape the cross someway, somehow, was agonizing enough, without his disciples discouraging him, even if it was through their ignorance of what was really happening. So Jesus quickly rebuked Peter with these

blunt words: *"Get thou behind me, Satan; for thou art an offence unto me; for thou savorest not the things that be of God, but those that be of men."*

3. The humanity of Jesus cringed at the awesome *suffering that awaited him.*

When the moment arrives for one to face a trying ordeal, e.g. the donation of a body organ to save the life of a loved one, the least thing one needs during the moment of contemplation is for a close friend to remind them that it is going to hurt, or that they might die, therefore they should try to find another way.

The necessity of Christ's suffering was borne out of his intense love for man (Lu. 9:22). He knew the cost and was ready to pay the horrendous price. How grateful we are for his mercy! No, it was not the judges in the Sanhedri, nor Pilate, who were in control of the proceedings during these final hours; but it was Jesus who was in full command, demonstrating the regality of his divine office. Jesus marched forward to the cross as conqueror renown to finish the work he must accomplish.

The Touch of the Master's Hand

T'was battered and scarred, and the auctioneer,
Thought it scarcely worth his while;
To waste his time on the old violin, but he held it up with a smile.
"What am I bid, good folk," cried he,
"A dollar? Two? Who will make it three?" Going once, Going twice—
But no! From the room far back, a gray haired man, came forward and picked up the bow;
And wiping the dust from the old violin, and tightening the loosened strings,
He played a melody, pure and sweet, as the caroling angels sing.
The music ceased and the auctioneer, now with a voice quiet and low,
Said, "Now what am I bid for the old violin?" as he held it up with the bow.
"Three thousand once, three thousand twice, going and gone," cried he.
The foolish crowd cheered, but some of them cried, "What changed its worth?"
Quick came the reply: "T'was the touch of the Master's hand."
And many a man with life out of tune,
Who is battered and scarred by sin,
Is auctioned cheap to a thoughtless world,
Much like that old violin.
A glass of wine, a game of chance, and he travels on;
He's going once—he's going twice—he's going—he's almost gone.
But the Master comes and the foolish crowd,
N'er can quite understand;
The worth of a soul, and the change that is wrought,
By the touch of the Master's hand!
—Anonymous

This proved to be a stumbling block to the Jews for out of their actions came the Good News for the world. It seemed like foolishness and weakness to the Gentiles, but in reality it was the wisdom and strength of the Almighty offering deliverance to sinners from the awful wages of sin.[5]

Later, the trip to Calvary was gloriously spoken of by the apostle Paul in these words: *"But made himself of no reputation, and took upon him the form of a servant, and was made in the likeness of men: And being found in fashion as a man, he humbled himself,* [emptied himself] *and became obedient unto death, even the death of the cross."*[6]

B. The most cruel punishment on earth

The decorative cross etched in a stained glass window that massively looms high above in the apse of a church, or that rises atop a lofty spire

reaching for the sky would never have been considered a loving memorial or work of esthetic beauty in Jesus' day. In that day the cross was an emblem of shame far worse than the rack or guillotine of the medieval ages, or the present ominous scaffold for hanging criminals. Cicero referred to crucifixion as, "This cruelest, most hideous of punishments." (Against Verres 2.5.165). It was one of the most shuddering penalties to be ordered by a civil government. Cruel and inhuman are soft words in comparison to the agony of this cursed method of putting a criminal to death, much less the innocent Angel from heaven.[7] It is no wonder that the disciples were set back in dismay and followed him afar off throughout his arrest and trial. It is quite understandable why the early evangelists found universal ridicule against their king, he was forced to stumble through the narrow streets of Jerusalem, past a long line of curious staring onlookers mingled among others weeping for him. In spirit of a conquering king, Jesus urged them not to weep for him, but rather for themselves, and for those who had never been born.

C. The longest night

Near the dawn, the most anxious and weary hours of the longest night ever experienced by anyone in the world began to take their toll on Jesus. His strength was drained from the cruelties he had suffered, his back was minced and blood drenched from the recent scourging. Under it alone many a strong man had died. Did Jesus' weakened condition cause him to stumble under the weight of the cross? For some reason, the centurion in charge of the executions quickly laid hold on a pilgrim from Cyrene, named Simon, and forced him to bear the cross after Jesus. Did Simon bear the cross out of anger or disappointment? No one knows what this man's innermost thoughts were at the moment. Was he angered and filled with resentment at having to touch the cross which made him unclean and prevented his worship for the Passover? The long period of cleansing would make it too late for him to enter the Temple area to present his gift, and he had come so far. The cleansing ceremony could take up to a week.[8] No one really knows the full import this had on his life. Mark says that he was "The father of Alexander and Rufus."[9] Later, Paul mentions men by the same name as laudable Christians in the church.[10] Could these have been the same men Mark mentioned? Why did Mark call their names? One would like to think Simon not only touched the Master's cross, but that the cross also touched him and that later, after learning the truth, he taught his entire family. If a Christian could span the centuries for a return trip to Jesus' time for the purpose of doing him the most tender deed of kindness, surely he would choose to help bear Jesus' cross; but then, Jesus would send him back to bear his own cross in this century.

Due to his ignorance of the events, Simon could have resented being forced to bear Jesus' cross. When circumstances forces a costly delay in our plans, forcing a detour in the day's agenda to help a brother bear his cross, let us remember to do so in love. The call of Christ is a stringent summons to serve for righteousness sake. "*And he said unto them all, If any man will come after me, let him deny himself and take up his cross daily, and follow me.*" John, in Revelation, records Jesus saying, "*Be thou faithful unto death, and I will give thee a crown of life.*" (Rev. 2:10). Our salvation called for the Saviour's all; it demands our all.

Jesus is either first in all of our life or he is not at all in our life.[11] To preach salvation without suffering with Jesus is to preach another Gospel which the New Testament knows nothing about.[12] To each of the seven churches in Asia, Jesus said, "*I know thy works . . .*" [13] Many would give a thousand worlds if he did not know, but he does. They tried to blindfold Jesus in the early hours of his trial, but John says his eyes "*were as a*

flame of fire . . . ."[14] They pierce any camouflage placed before them.

D. Calvary

Upon arrival at the brow of Calvary, the hardened soldiers began to carry out their macabre orders. They stretched Jesus upon the cross and drove iron spikes through his hands into the transverse beam. Some say these were driven through the wrists. Then, they fitted his feet below on the stake in similar manner and dropped the cross into its slot. But their duty was not over until the prisoner was dead. So, the Bible says they sat down and "watched him there."[15] Although they watched carefully, they saw nothing beyond the execution of a criminal. Jesus had said earlier to his disciples, "*but blessed are your eyes, for they see . . . ,*" [16] but concerning others, he had said: "*they seeing, see not*" And so it has been throughout history when great things were happening. The soldiers were watching, but they only saw a felon dying. Their chief interest was to gamble for his seamless robe.[17] Little did they know that their actions were playing a role in providing the spotless robes of eternal life.[18]

The law called for posting the charge against the criminal being crucified. This was attached above the head on the cross. In Jesus' case it was written and posted by Pilate himself.[19] While preparing this charge, Pilate saw his opportunity to publicly demonstrate his contempt for the Jews' actions. He knew full well their deeds were motivated from envy against Jesus and that they had hypocritically trumped up flimsy charges to put him to death.[20]

They charged that Jesus was attempting to make himself a king.[21] They were trying to find civil charges against Jesus which carried the death penalty. To make himself king smacked of insurrection. This would make Jesus a criminal in Rome's courts. Pilate would be forced into action or risk a confrontation with Caesar. Innocent or not, Pilate did not want this to happen. After a thorough interrogation, Pilate did not believe the charge to be a civil one, but a private matter among themselves. Therefore, when the governor affixed the charge to the cross it read in Hebrew, Greek and Latin so all could know:

1. "This Jesus the King of the Jews."

The Jews attempted to get Pilate to change the wording to say that Jesus only "claimed to be king of the Jews." What hypocrisy! First, in order to get their capital charge approved by Pilate, they presented the charge as true. Now that he is being crucified, they say it was only a claim. This was essentially an admission that the only capital offense was fictitious.

Pilate answered them tersely: "*What I have written, I have written,*" and publicly placarded their diabolical hypocrisy over the head of the One they were putting to death. Think of the possible political fallout from Pilate crucifying a little known Jewish rabbi just because he *claimed he was a king.* They were hypocrites when they said they were keeping the Law of Moses (Matt. 23:1ff); they were hypocrites when they said they believed the prophets and yet rejected Christ (Matt.12:39-41); and they were hypocrites when they put Jesus to death. By a stroke of the pen, Pilate displayed their glaring hypocrisy in Hebrew, Greek and Latin upon the cross for the entire world to see. *No wonder they wanted it removed.* One cannot help but think that it was the hand of God working in the matter to have righteousness say the last word at the cross—declaring with a universal inscription that all people could read—Jesus was King of all.

After routing Satan in the draining temptations in the wilderness, the scriptures say that "*When the devil had ended all the temptations, he departed from him for a season.*"[22] At the cross the Devil returned in full power. It was his moment, and the hour of darkness. No one can fathom the impact of the taunting

remarks hurled in the face of the omnipotent One on the cross when the chief priests, the scribes and the elders said, "*He saved others; himself he cannot save. If he be the King of Israel, let him come down from the cross, and we will believe on him.*"[23]

Only when we understand that the Son of God could have come down in a flash with legions of angels in full array, will we know a little about the rigors of this temptation. There would be nothing more in this moment than the sarcasm of their mockery if this were not true. But while Jesus could have come down, *he could not come down.* If Jesus would descend from the cross, they said they would believe, but they were only mocking. Since they had refused to accept him after he raised Lazarus from the dead, why would they believe if he came down from the cross? In the narrative of the rich man and Lazarus, Jesus quoted Abraham as saying that the Jews would not believe even though someone returned from the dead to tell them differently. After the resurrection, they refused to accept the evidence. Had he appeared to them personally, they would have said that it was some kind of a trick; even to this day some assert that he never died on the cross, but that he only fainted.

By Jesus' withstanding the taunts and ugly mockery of his persecutors, he obtained victory for all believers. Out of his love for each soul's salvation, he painfully remained on the cross, valiant to death. Thus, he became Victor over his enemies, leading captivity captive. His enduring the cross became his crowning deed of love to lift others up to God.

Jesus was not dying alone. He was suspended between two thieves who may very well have been charged along with the outlaw Barabbas of national crimes against the government. Insurrectionists seeking a new order feel justified in financing their movements with thievery. Barabbas was freed in a prisoner exchange deal struck by Pilate and the Jews. The others had to perish.

At the beginning, both thieves joined in the taunts of the crowd against Jesus. Yet, as the day wore on and the moment of death drew closer, one of them had second thoughts. Had he heard about the spiritual aspect of Jesus' kingship and his promise of eternal life? There must have been something regal about Jesus' Spirit in the way he faced death; something that caused the thief to feel an inner swell of hope rising in his breast that the things which he had heard about Jesus and his promise of life after death were true after all.

The thief did not hear any cursing of his tormentors from Jesus' parched lips; rather he heard him bless them and say, "*Father, forgive them; for they know not what they do.*"[24] No! It was plain to him that there was something different about Jesus. From below, the executioners had been chiding Jesus about destroying the Temple and raising it up in three days.

Did the thief think that Jesus just might set up a new order in three days? As death drew near, an abrupt change swelled up inside the shrine of his soul. This change becomes very apparent when he rebukes his partner in crime for siding with Jesus' accusers. Then, with only a few breaths left, and without a glimmer of hope elsewhere to be had, the thief gasps to Jesus between winces of pain: "*Remember me when thou comest into thy kingdom.*"[25] One may recall here the petition made by Joseph to a fellow prisoner, only to be forgotten.[26]

Jesus responded immediately by promising the thief that he would be with him that day in Paradise. The thief was pardoned and justified by faith, just as Abraham had been, and all other saints of the Old Testament era. [27]

One should remember that even though this conversion is recorded in the New Testament it is before the death of Jesus, and, according to Hebrews 9:16-17, under the Old Testament system. It was about forty days before the Great Commission was given to the apostles in Mark 16:5-16 to preach the Gospel to every

creature.

As the moment of death came closer, Jesus felt an awful separation from God coming upon himself and cried aloud for God not to abandon him. None of us can fathom that awful wail![28] Then, the moment for his exodus arrived when he victoriously sighed: *"It is finished."* Luke adds, *"Father, into thy hands I commend my Spirit."*[29]

When these words were gasped, the ground trembled, the sun hid its face, and the veil in the Temple was split from top to bottom. Even though there was an extended period of grace until Pentecost, the old order had, with the death of Jesus, come to a shameful close (Col. 2:14). Although the Temple veil was rent, making known the way into the Holiest of Holies, there is yet a scramble to return to that old system of exclusion where they cowered before a mysterious God that dwelt in total darkness behind a beautiful but forbidding veil. With a sudden merciful release from agonizing pain and with the wings of an eagle, God bore Jesus over into Paradise. At this moment the writers speak of a Roman centurion, trained in the art of blood letting and having seen the rigors of death many times before his eyes, reflectively spoke a unique judgment upon all that had happened: *"Truly this man was the Son of God."*[30] Even though this was stated in the past tense, it is a statement from a seasoned Roman soldier. *Inspiration is revealing that there is more faith to be found among thieves and executioners than in among these Jewish priests. Woe to us if this can ever be said about the church of Christ in these later years.*

2. The cross: the ultimate indictment against sin

Of all the indictments that can be brought against sin, we reach the ultimate at Calvary. It was sin that had captured the hearts of evil men in his day and made them calloused to all that was beautiful in the son of God. All men are captivated sometime by the lusts of the flesh and the results have wrought havoc down through the centuries. Good people have risen to champion great causes in various ages only to have religious hypocrites rise up to murder them in the name of God like Annas and Caiphas.

Sin still persists, but thanks be to God, in the long term, righteousness persists even more. The unjust and the merciless wield their weapons of wrath slaying anything in their path. We tire of the horrible depressing stories reported in the news media. But crime makes the news because its utter selfishness and disregard for life and social responsibility are still considered inhuman and unusual. May it never be that righteousness becomes so unusual that it begins to be considered *news*. Sin is considered news because it is associated with shocking violence and because of its incredible devastation of the good and beautiful. Yet, righteousness allows it to tread only so far and then it says, "Enough!" Satan has only limited power. A demand for fairness and social order is a great ally to the meek and still persists in this world in civil governments, as faulty as they are. God will use these agents for good until the day when he will cause every knee to bow at the name of Jesus.[31]

3. The cross: the revelation of God's love.

But if the cross is the capital indictment against sin, it is also the revelation of the cosmic love of God for the sinner. Whoever would make an accusation that God is aloof that he does not care let *them fairly view the cross.* Those who would minimize sin, let these stand at the foot of the cross and see God agonizing over the sins of the world delivering it by the sacrifice of himself. Paul seems to have summed up Calvary with these words: *"But we preach Christ crucified, unto the Jews a stumbling block, and unto the Greeks*

foolishness; but unto them that are called, both Jews and Greeks, Christ the power of God, and the wisdom of God."[32]

But death did not defeat Jesus. It only made it possible for him to make good on his promise to build his church in spite of this enemy.[33] Not only did those who opposed Jesus want to make certain that he was dead, they wanted to make sure that his disciples could not make any credible claim about his return.

Therefore, they placed a huge stone over the grave opening, sealed it with a secured zone and placed a troop of soldiers to guard the entrance.

After all their tedious precautions, just as prophesied by Jesus, the grave was found empty on the third day following. We wonder if their face was red.

E. Post-resurrection appearances of Jesus

Even though the Jews paid large sums of money to stop the rumor of Jesus' resurrection, it persisted. Various appearances by Jesus were reported by the disciples, both individually and collectively. Not only did he appear to Mary at the garden tomb early on the first day of the week, but twice to the disciples as well who were meeting behind closed doors.[34] He also appeared on the road to Emmaus to two of the disciples who were returning home from Jerusalem after the weekend with their faith a total wreck. Note the past tense in their speech as they speak of their faith in Jesus: *"But we trusted that it had been he which would have redeemed Israel: and besides all this, today is the third day since these things were done."*[35] What a tremendous lesson for all. At that very moment they were speaking to the resurrected Jesus. After he made himself known to them, they returned to Jerusalem with great joy. Later, he appeared to all the apostles.

1. Did the disciples really see Jesus after his resurrection?

Were all of the disciples only seeing figments of their imaginations? Were they merely seeing things they wanted to see? The facts in the accounts are—*they were not looking for Jesus after his death.* They had completely dismissed the idea of having him around. He was dead, and they began returning to their homes in disillusionment. It had been a wonderful experience with him, but after the events of that horrible day in Jerusalem, all was only a shattered dream. So they returned to their fishing occupations. It has been remarked that these reported appearances by Jesus were only hallucinations of these disciples. But could five hundred have had the same hallucination all at once?[36]

James Stewart relates a story from a drama by John Masefield where the English dramatist speaks of the aftermath of the crucifixion in his *Trial of Jesus*. After the crucifixion was over, the Roman centurion in charge of it reported to Pilate. Procula, the name used for Pilate's wife, was present. She called the centurion aside to speak further about Jesus' decease. She asked him: "Do you think that he is dead?" (Remember she had warned Pilate to be careful with Jesus, because she had suffered many things about him in a dream.)[37] To Procula's question, Longinus, the centurion, replies:

"No, lady, I don't."

"Then where is he?" Procula queries.

"Let loose in the world, lady, where neither Roman nor Jew can stop his truth."

So, Masefield's centurion speaks for all disciples. The fact of the resurrection has prevailed for twenty centuries because Jesus now reigns over his kingdom which can never be destroyed.[38] The Son of God lives and reigns when and wherever a heart believes.[39] By his eternal power all baptized believers are being translated from the kingdom of darkness into the kingdom

of God's dear son.[40] It will be easier for the planets to be removed from their orbit than for the word of the Son of God to be replaced.[41]

2. The resurrection is unimpeachable history.

That the resurrection is a part of history is unimpeachable. Those who would criticize the erratic and somewhat different versions of those who saw Jesus after the resurrection, with a view to discrediting it, should stop and think for a moment. Suppose last night a few people had seen something of this magnitude, something they knew they saw as unusual as the resurrection of a dead person whom they knew well and loved dearly.

One can only imagine the fervor of excitement this would cause and the exuberant talk generated in its wake. Recalling the shock and aftermath of John Kennedy's assassination, we remember the confused accounts that were flying everywhere during the early hours after the tragedy. Various accounts of what happened still persist until this very day even after several carefully documented films have been aired repeatedly. If such confused stories still persist after a tragedy like John Kennedy's assassination, what do you suppose would follow in the wake of a resurrection that had been witnessed by over five-hundred people at once. *Those people were willing to die for what they said they absolutely saw.*[42] Either those good people saw those things, or they were false witnesses. If they were false witnesses, why were they willing to give their lives for their testimony rather than recant their story and save themselves?

The records have preserved for us the emotional effect that the resurrection had upon those who saw Jesus. Diversity of details serve to give us more insight into the highly charged atmosphere of that early morning experience. The women came to anoint the body of a *dead man.* When they found the grave empty, they were extremely depressed, but when they found him alive they were ecstatic. Think what this extreme reversal of emotion must have had on them!

Some think that diversity in the Gospel accounts indicate some tampering with the text. It has been suggested that the resurrection story was added later by the church which had gleaned the accounts from overly zealous disciples whose faith had gone beyond what had actually occurred at the time. *But if all had been recorded in perfect order, and no indication of excitement could be detected in the text regarding the reaction of those who witnessed the resurrection of Jesus, then, one might well become suspicious of the accounts.*

However, the Gospels preserve for us a charged atmosphere created by the events on that day, along with the emotional responses of the witnesses. Not long ago there was a terrible train wreck in Illinois. The local newspaper reporters were dashing about at the scene interviewing eyewitnesses of the tragedy. The evening edition of the paper carried various accounts of the wreck as related by those interviewed. The earliest accounts were evidently hurriedly put together and reflected the excitement of those who saw the wreck. There were some incongruities in details but these only added to the fact that a great tragedy had actually happened and the effect it had upon those who saw it.

One can only imagine the high degree of excitement created by the early appearances of the Lord when the disciples came seeking Jesus *among the dead* and found him alive, *risen from the dead.* These varied accounts do not take from the fact of the resurrection but, quite the contrary, they improve the value of the information.

3. Is the resurrection believable today?

One wonders why some find the information concerning the resurrection so incredible two thousand years after the fact, when thousands believed it within days. Only fifty days later when Peter and the other apostles declared the whole story on the day of Pentecost (Acts 2), there were 3,000 that believed. A few days later the number was swelled by 5,000 more.

Many of those who heard the facts preached by the disciples on Pentecost had been present in Jerusalem when these things happened only fifty-three days prior. They found the apostles' testimony extremely credible. If the facts were a gross misrepresentation of what really happened, surely the enemies of Jesus would have moved quickly to produce concrete evidence that proved the stories untrue.

But where were the enemies? What were they doing while these resurrection accounts were first trickling in? The Scriptures tell us they were busy paying money to false witnesses in an attempt *to silence the stories.* Later, they attempted to silence the apostles with threats.[43]

No one stood up with an intelligent rebuttal to the apostles. They just hurled one threat after another at the apostles and imprisoned the evangelists. Later, they began putting to death those who believed and taught in the name of Jesus. With nothing to disprove the message of Jesus' life after death, the factual account of his resurrection spread like a wild fire on a dry, wind swept prairie.

4. The resurrection affected a great change upon the disciples' lives.

Besides not being able to muzzle the preaching of the resurrection, another thing that heavily supported its validity is the great change the resurrection had upon the disciples' lives. Let us not forget those disciples who were returning to Emmaus from Jerusalem after the crucifixion of Jesus. They were completely dejected and had lost all hope in Jesus.[44] As observed in the text, they spoke of hope only in the past tense when the Stranger joined them in their sad trek back to their routine lives in Emmaus: "*But we trusted that it* ***had been*** *he which should have redeemed Israel . . . .*" [Emph. F.D.N.] Later, in their homes at the evening meal, Jesus revealed himself to them. They were ecstatic and returned to Jerusalem, immediately telling everyone what they had seen.

5. Did the disciples merely invent the resurrection story?

In view of the evidence, thinking that the disciples only fabricated the resurrection story to simply bolster their own morale is more incredible than believing the resurrection. Those good men did not lie. *Men are not willing to perish for fictitious stories they tell.* Those men wanted us to know exactly what they had experienced.

Listen to John the beloved apostle: "*That which was from the beginning, which we have heard, which we have seen with our eyes, which we have looked upon, and our hands have handled, of the word of life.*"[45]

John was present when Thomas refused to believe the word spoken by the apostles concerning Jesus resurrection. The same apostle recorded Thomas as saying, "*Except I shall see in his hands the print of the nails, and put my finger into the print of the nails, and thrust my hand into his side, I will not believe.*" (John 20:25). After eight days, the record reveals that Jesus came into the midst of the apostles. They were meeting behind closed doors. Here he offered Thomas the concrete evidence he had demanded when he said: "*Reach hither thy finger, and behold my hands; and reach hither thy hand, and*

thrust it into my side; and be not faithless, but believing." Upon seeing the evidence with his own eyes, Thomas answered Jesus with these words, "*My Lord and my God.*"[46]

Such hard evidence is worthy of our best consideration, along with the continuing historical fact of the church of Christ. How did the church begin? How could the little fledgling church so heatedly opposed by deadly enemies dedicated to its extermination have survived? Many have preached the funeral of the church as well as the demise of the Bible it preaches; yet, both the church and the Word that sustains it refuse to die. The Resurrection fact is the touchstone of the church of Christ. Those who reject the resurrection fact will have to deal fairly with the origin and continuance of the church which has survived awesome attempts to put it out of existence. They should also come to terms with the continued dramatic change that occurs in the lives of many people who have heard and have been touched by the truth.

6. The resurrection of Jesus was assured before Jesus ever entered the world.

Jesus, John declares, is the essence of life. "*In him was life; and the life was the light of men.*"[47] John also recalls Jesus saying, "*I am the way, the truth, and the life,*" and that no man could come to the Father except by himself. Truth and life, in the understanding of the early disciples who knew the facts, were inseparable. Jesus who was perfect truth and holiness could not be kept in the grave. Regarding this, Peter says: "*Whom God hath raised up, having loosed the pains of death; because it was* ***not possible*** *that he should be holden of it . . . this same Jesus hath God raised up, whereof we all are witnesses.*"

Jesus was filled with life and the holy Spirit. He repeatedly proved this in his ministry by performing miracles of heal-

Jesus' Burial	Jesus' Resurrection	Post Resurrection Appearances	The Forty Days	Jesus' Ascension
Matt. 27:61-28:1	Tomb Site	**Sunday afternoon**	Acts 1:3 Luke 24:34	Mark 16:19-20
	Open Tomb	1. Peter	I Cor. 15:5	
	Matt. 28:2-4	2. Two disciples	Mark 16:12-13	
Mark 15:47-16:2	Women/Angels		Luke 24:13-32	
	Matt. 28:5-8	3. Disciples - Thomas absent	Mark 16:14	
	Mark 16:2-8		Luke 24:36-43	
	Luke 24:1		John 20:19-25	Luke 24:5-53
	John 20:1-2	**Following Sunday**	John 20:26-29	
	Peter; John	Disciples- Thomas present	John 21:1-23	
	Luke 24:12	**Remaining days of the forty**		
	John 20:3-10	1. Disciple, sea of Galilee	Matt. 28: 16-20	Acts 1:9
Luke 23:55-56	Women/Jesus	2. Disciples, mountain in Galilee	Mark 16:15-18	
	Matt. 28:9-10		I Cor. 15:6	
	Mark 16:9-11		Luke 24:44-49	
	Luke 14:9-11	3. Disciples in Jerusalem	Acts 1:3-8	
	John 20:11-18			
	To the 500			
	I Cor. 15:6			

ing and raising the dead. With abandonment of pure love, Jesus gave himself for all on the cross. He then took his life up again after giving his blood as a ransom payment for sin.[48] Jesus' resurrection, when viewed from his inherent power, is not a moot question. It was virtually impossible for it not to have happened. When one considers that Jesus spent forty days with the disciples after his resurrection, "teaching them things concerning the kingdom," we know that they did not merely stumble into a resurrection theory, but had an absolute prolonged experience of it. This made them willing to lay down their lives for their knowledge. They were by this knowledge empowered to gladly undergo horrifying persecutions unto death. Where did they find commitment to do this? They did not get it from a doctrine springing forth from a vain imagination nor wishful thinking. Such embracing fortitude came from their experience of being with Jesus *after calvary*. Hear their testimony once again: "*That which we have seen and heard declare we unto you . . .*" and, "*for we have not followed cunningly devised fables, when we made known unto you the power and coming of our Lord Jesus Christ, but were eyewitnesses of his majesty.*"[49]

Thus, the resurrection was their assurance of eternal life. "*I will come again,*" Jesus pledged, "*and receive you unto myself.*"[50]

7. The meaning of the resurrection.

(1) The resurrection meant that all their training in the Law of Moses had been true—that God had sent his prophet just as Moses had declared.[51] Beyond a shadow of a doubt in their minds, Jesus of Nazareth was the promised Messiah. This meant he was truly Lord of lords and King of kings. His death was not a thing forced upon him by his enemies but was a loving surrender; a giving of himself as an atonement for the sins of the world.

(2) It meant that this prophet had come and God's word was proven true. If the Old Testament had been fulfilled in Jesus, then all else was assured them. Jesus was the embodied Old Testament; the living character of God revealed among man. All God's love, mercy and goodness were wrapped together in one fleshly package. No, all the forces of evil could not keep him in the grave.

(3) It meant that the righteousness of God had won over Satan and the final victory for God was now assured. The war may have to wage on for a time, but they were on the winning side.

(4) It also meant that the last words Christ spoke to the disciples on earth was more than a fading memory. It was their constant, current reality that Jesus would keep his promise to them when he said: "*Lo, I am with you alway even unto the end of the world.*"[52]

Christ placed the problem of disbelief in the whole heart of man, not just his intelligence, but his emotions and his will as well. Peter said that a person could possess "wilful ignorance."[53] Paul supports this by saying, "*And even as they did not like to retain God in their knowledge,*" and again, "*being alienated from the life of God through the ignorance that is in them, because of the blindness of their heart.*" [54]

8. Unbelievers disregard the facts.

What is intelligent about rejecting the resurrection when those who reject it disregard the facts? Anti-resurrectionists continue to imitate the Athenian intelligentsia who responded to Paul's preaching the resurrection like this: "*When they heard of the resurrection of the dead, some mocked; and others said, "We will hear thee of this matter.*"[55] Paul, perhaps recalling the Saviour's admonition to "*cast not your pearls*" before closed hearts, acted promptly by departing from among them.

Any who would consider rejecting the resurrection today should consider defining Christianity without it. Trying to offer an explanation for Christianity without the resurrection *is like trying to explain a gasoline engine while denying any possibility of internal combustion.* If Jesus was not resurrected from the dead, his entire life was a big hoax and the apostles who preached this message were the greatest fabricators ever to live on this earth, completely, devoid of any conscience whatsoever.

Sure, Christianity, like other movements in history, has had its zealous protective adherents who might have embellished their experiences with the fanciful; but it is not likely that any of these would have stuck by their stories if threatened with crucifixion, or being burned alive, or fed to wild animals as were many of the Christians in the early centuries of its existence.

Did Jesus Rise from the Dead?

—Dan Lightfoot—

Via The Voice of Truth International

Men have been arguing about the resurrection of Jesus through the centuries. Did he, or did he not, come forth from the grave? For those who question the reality of his resurrection, there are a number of considerations to face.

1. The empty tomb. Even the critics of Jesus took the fact of the empty tomb for granted (Matthew 28:13-15; John 20:15).

2. The disciples' eyewitness experiences of the risen Christ. They were not expecting it though Jesus had spoken of his resurrection. When he did appear to them, they became reluctant believers. It was too good to be true, but they had seen him . . . (I Cor. 15:17-19).

No time for legend to develop. And they did it in the very city where he had been crucified. Their testimony was that God raised him from the dead.

4. The apostles were changed men. At the death of Jesus they had proven themselves craven cowards and had fled. Peter even denied that he knew the Lord. But these men were changed into courageous confessors and bold witnesses. They now believed that Jesus had been raised from the dead and were willing to die for their convictions. It's not easy to explain such a change.

5. The resurrection of Christ became the heart and core of their preaching. They freely admitted that if the resurrection was not true then everything else was worthless (I Cor. 15:17-19).

6. The failure of the Sanhedrin to silence the apostles. The Jewish leaders could not disprove their message even though they had the power and motivation to do so.

7. The Lord's Day. The church began to worship on Sunday even though the Sabbath (Saturday) had been kept for countless generations.

8. Saul's conversion. His ministry to the Gentiles can scarcely be explained apart from the resurrection of Jesus.

Considering such as these cause me to have great confidence in the historicity of Jesus' resurrection. I believe.

References

1. John 19:10-11
2. John 19:11
3. Mark 10:45
4. John 10:18
5. I Corinthians 1:18-25
6. Philippians 2:7-8
7. Galatians 3:13; Deuteronomy 21:23
8. Numbers 19
9. Mark 14:21
10. Romans 16:13
11. Matthew 6:33
12. Galatians 1:8-9
13. Revelations 2:3
14. Luke 22:64; Revelation 1:4
15. Matthew 27:36
16. Matthew 13:16
17. Luke 15:24
18. Galatians 3:27ff.
19. John 19:19
20. Matthew 27:18
21. John 19:12
22. Luke 4:13
23. Matthew 27:42
24. Luke 23:34
25. Luke 23:42
26. Genesis 40:14, 23
27. Hebrews 9:16-17
28. Matthew 27:46 cf. Psa. 22:1
29. John 19:30; Luke 23:46
30. Matthew 27:50-54; Mark 14:39
31. Philippians 2:10
32. I Corinthians 1:23-24
33. Matthew 16:18
34. John 20:19-29
35. Luke 24:21
36. I Corinthians 15:6
37. Matthew 27:19
38. Daniel 2:44
39. Luke 17:20-21
40. Colossians 1:13-14
41. Matthew 5:18
42. I John 1:1-3
43. Acts 4:21
44. Luke 24:13-35
45. I John 1:1-2
46. John 20:26-28
47. John 1:4
48. I Peter 1:17-18
49. I John 1:3; II Peter 1:16
50. John 14:1-6
51. Deuteronomy 18:18-19
52. Matthew 28:19-20
53. II Peter 3:5
54. Ephesians 4:18
55. Acts 17:32

Supplementary Readings

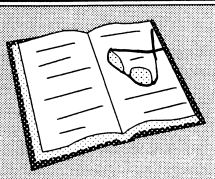
Latham, Henry. *The Risen Master.* Cambridge: Deighton Bell and Co., 1901

Milligan, William. *The Resurrection of Our Lord.* London: Macmillan & Co., 1881

Orr, James. *The Resurrection of Jesus.* Cincinnati: Jennings and Graham, 1909

Questions for Chapter Twenty-one

1. What caused Jesus to pursue a resolute course to a shameful end?
2. What were the factors mentioned involved in Jesus' death?
3. Relate the events in the anxious hours of the night of Jesus' arrest.
4. How is the cross the ultimate indictment against sin and the revelation of God's love?
5. Why is the history of the resurrection unimpeachable?
6. How were the disciples' lives affected by the resurrection?
7. What are various meanings of the resurrection today?



Mine Eyes Have Seen the Glory

Mine eyes have seen the glory
of the coming of the Lord;
He is trampling out the vintage
Where the grapes of wrath are stored;
He hath loosed the faithful lightening
of his terrible swift sword;
His truth is marching on.

He has sounded forth his trumpet
that shall never call retreat;
He is sifting out the hearts of men
before his judgement seat.
O, be swift, my soul, to answer Him!
be jubilant, my feet!
Our God is marching on.

In the beauty of the lilies,
Christ was born across the sea,
With a glory in his bosom
that transfigures you and me;
As he died to make men holy,
Let us teach to make men free;
While God is marching on.

Glory! glory, hallelujah! Glory! glory, hallelujah!
His truth is marching on.

–Julia Ward Howe

Chapter Twenty-two

Grace All Sufficient

I. The Great Paradox: The Finish is the Beginning
   A. God's grace is perfect: Do not tamper
   B. Jesus' work after Calvary differs in nature
      1. Christ now works by the Holy Spirit after Calvary, through the influence of the written word.
      2. The early church seemed weak and unimpressive
      3. Intellectual centers scorned the message of the early missionaries
      4. The early church labored under difficult traveling conditions
      5. Awesome temptations faced the small church
      6. The initial assignment of the early missionary was extremely difficult
      7. Why the disciples conquered against staggering odds
      8. The disciples preached hope against the arch enemy of man—death.
      9. They preached Jesus Christ as Lord over their lives
      10. They preached Jesus as King—presently reigning

HRIST IS ALL IN ALL,
OR NOTHING AT ALL

Chapter Twenty-two

Grace All Sufficient

Matthew 27:27; Mark 14:26; Luke 23:38; John 19:19-22
I Corinthians 15:25

King of my life, I crown Thee Now,
Thine shall the glory be . . .
—Jennie E. Hussey

1. THE GREAT PARADOX: THE FINISH IS THE BEGINNING

There is a great paradox in Jesus' statement on the cross: "It is finished." In this he put the stamp of completion upon his initial work of redemption which he accomplished in his incarnation and atoning death. Although Jesus said, "It is finished," much of his work remained unfinished. The completion of his atonement on the cross was in reality the beginning of his action in all the world. This is evident in the Gospel messages.

None of the writers close their Books with any finality. The reader is made to feel that there is to be only a momentary lull after the evangelists close their Gospels until the arrival of the new spiritual age. One is made to feel that there is more to come and that he is being swept along with a continuing series which will follow without delay.

There is no disappointment, for twenty-three more volumes follow in hot pursuit, which continue to unveil in greater detail the beginning history of the kingdom of Heaven.

New Gethsemanes, unjust trials, Calvaries and wine presses of suffering were destined paths to be trodden by future disciples. When Jesus was stumbling through the streets of Jerusalem bearing the weight of the cross to his death, many who lined the streets wept in pity.

However, Christ said to them, "*Daughters of Jerusalem, weep not for me, but weep for yourselves, and for your children . . . for if they do these things in a green tree, what shall they do in a dry?*"[1]

But his earthly ministry was over. The triumph over Satan was absolute. The perfect sacrifice had been offered for sin. Jesus was the Lamb without spot making atonement possible with God.[2]

A. God's grace is perfect—do not tamper with it

Grace had omitted nothing which was needed to avail man's redemption. Since the means of grace is now perfect, man must never tamper with what has been done or written. There is always pressure from subtle demonic forces to rewrite the message of God—to change that which has been written, to call for a new hermeneutic, to either subtract from the means of grace or else supplement it in some fashion.

The Jews tried to get Pilate to change the charges posted over Jesus' head, but Pilate, for whatever his reasons, gave the correct answer for the centuries: "*What I have written, I have written,*" and that is the way the New Testament must stand. John wrote, "*If there come any to you, and bring not this doctrine, receive him not into your house, neither bid him God speed: for he that bideth him God speed is a partaker of his evil deeds.*"[3]

John further admonishes those who would have a mind to alter God's word in Revelation: "*If any man should add unto these things, God shall add unto him the plagues that are written in this book: and if any man shall take away from the words of the book of this prophecy, God shall take away his part out of the book of life, and out of the holy city, and from the things which are written in this book.*"[4] Presuming to edit God's word is to deny its claim of perfection; it also says that we know more about it than those men who were on the scene when it happened.

B. Jesus' work after Calvary differs in nature

Jesus had to return to the Ancient of Days to receive his kingdom (Dan. 7). Then, after receiving all authority he would reign in a new phase of his work.[5] *After being seated on the right hand of God and receiving the promised throne of David, he must reign over the kingdom until all enemies are made his footstool.*[6] That Christ's work transcended his earthly mission is made clear by Saul of Tarsus. Luke, in Acts 9, relates Saul's testimony of a post resurrectional appearance on the Damascan road where Jesus called him to be a witness to the Gentiles.[7] In the Acts account, Saul confronts Jesus and confesses him as Lord in a face to face discussion that left the persecutor blind. After Saul's baptism three days later, he zealously undertook his new commission. The history of his missionary journeys and letters to the various churches of the first century fill most of the New Testament. No, the mission of the Master was not completed at Calvary—it was just getting started. Jesus told the apostles, "Greater works than these shall ye do."

1. Christ now works by the Holy Spirit after Calvary, through the influence of the written word.

The church is the spiritual body of Christ.[8] The will of God is to be performed in this body until Jesus returns (Eph. 3:21). In Acts, the disciples banded together in a working fellowship dedicated to the dar-

How To Be Saved In Christ

1. With the heart one believes UNTO righteousness (Rom. 10:10)
2. With the mouth one confesses UNTO salvation (Rom. 10:10)
3. God hath granted us repentance UNTO life (Acts 11:18)
4. One is baptized INTO Christ (Gal. 3:26-27; Rom. 6:3-4)
5. One must continue to believe IN Christ (Col. 2:5-7)

ing challenge of converting their lost neighbors. This was the church in action under the Great Commission

This task, incredible as it may seem, did not appear to them unattainable. They were convinced that Jesus was alive and would continually be present with them in Spirit and power. In this we find the explanation for their successful march from the shame of Calvary to the conversion of Rome—all within three centuries. Such defies human reasoning, considering the awesome obstacles that faced the church. What were some of them?

2. The early church seemed weak and unimpressive.

They had no impressive credentials to present to the authorities or any parading armies with flying banners. They were without political influence whatsoever. How could a small handful of men and women, mostly from the underprivileged and even slaves, overcome the pagan mistress of land and sea? The church of Christ marched out solely under the commission of Christ. Her only weapon was love untainted with hypocrisy. With this awesome weapon she firmly entrenched the faith among the pagans in a difficult but brief period. Only the continued work of a resurrected Jesus working through the Spirit can supply us with an adequate answer.

3. Intellectual centers scorned the message of the early missionaries (Acts 17).

Some of the outlying cities as the egotistical, sophisticated Athens may have mocked the message of the resurrection initially, but the time soon came when their laughing hushed. By the mid sixties, when Nero attempted to stop the Christians with torture, it was too late. The persistent preaching of the resurrection message allowed the flowing blood from Calvary's brow to seep into the crevices of many Roman citizen's heart who had been accustomed only to the deadness and formalism of their pagan religions. Their success, according to their own testimony, was due to the continuing work of Christ leading his legions with the message of love, resurrection and promise of eternal life through Jesus Christ their Lord.

4. The early church labored under difficult traveling conditions.

Travel was one of many intimidating problems which they encountered. Travel accommodations alone would cause the modern missionary to be appalled. Even at its very best, traveling would have been extremely taxing. Their southern travels took them trekking through the scorching expanses of the barren Sinai wilderness. Their northward journeys of traversing Asia Minor required their crossing the frigid mountain passes of the Sicilian Gates. One can only wonder what these dedicated souls would have accomplished with our modern means of travel and communications.

What made them adequate to meet the rigors of their day? To begin, their message was underscored with the shout "*Our God is able.*" Never did they attribute any success to their own strength. They had none of their former cockiness or self assurances which characterized them before Calvary. There was no room for it when a diabolical emperor such as Nero was bent on their destruction. The victory, however, belonged to Jesus as he alone was Lord of the entire universe.

The disciples were zealous in proclaiming Jesus as both Lord and Christ. The continuing work of Jesus, with his assured presence in the Spirit, compelled his dis-

ciples to proclaim his universal authority to all men. Those things motivated these men and are the propelling factors which have kept the saints marching in every age.[9]

This is the only explanation for the incredible power which made them equal for the impossible missions of their hour: "*And such trust we have through Christ to Godward: Not that we are sufficient of ourselves to think any thing as of ourselves; but our sufficiency is of God; who also has made us able ministers of the new testament . .. .*"[10] God's sufficiency in Christ coupled with their faith kindled the flames that set fire to the Roman empire.

5. Awesome temptations faced the small church.

They were not immune to reverses and the embarrassment of disciple drop-out. Jesus had lost much of his original following before he was crucified;[11] after the establishment of the church when the evangelists were struggling to spread the truth, drop outs continued. Some quitters like Demas, who loved the world more than the church, hinder Paul's work. Phygellus, Hermogenes, Ananias and his wife are but a few more who also quit under various temptations. Entire churches, like Ephesus, waned in their love for the Gospel. Others, like Laodicea, gradually became lukewarm and finally died.[12] Concerned epistles such as Galatians, Hebrews and I Peter were written to rebuke the fickle and encourage the faint hearted. Yet, dedicated saints survived the hot withering influence of the great cities, the philosophies of Athens, and the Corinthian temples of corruption. By keeping their robes spotless, they marched forward with power in the straight and narrow way.

If the early disciples received power to overcome in the physical, mental and moral aspects of their lives, their crowning achievement came in the spiritual realm. The indwelling Holy Spirit confirmed their preaching and work with incontestable proofs that Christ was alive and well and continued to carry on his work through them.[13] With this invigorating power, they marched from one impossible victory to another in Jerusalem, Judea, Samaria and into the uttermost parts of the world.[14] Their conquering faith brings to mind these well known words of Charles Wesley:

Soldiers of Christ arise, and put your armor on; Strong in the strength which God supplies, through His beloved Son.

6. The initial assignment of the early missionary was extremely difficult.

The Lord had directed the apostles to begin in Jerusalem. For an initial work site this seemed the most illogical place in the world as this was where they had already suffered such ignominy and shame. Luke marks Jerusalem as the beginning spot for the apostles' preaching with these words: "*Thus it is written, that the Christ should suffer and on the third day rise from the dead, and that repentance and forgiveness of sins should be preached in his name to all nations, beginning at Jerusalem.*"[15]

The church should keep this anomaly in mind. Far too many desire to work only in a mission site where there is the least resistance to the message. Had such disciples been present then, they would have pointed out that Jerusalem was the last place to begin Christian evangelism. They would quickly request other cities where there was much less prejudice and where Calvary was unknown. And while these disciples searched for a more convenient place for Christianity to take root, *they would have missed the wonderful experience of baptizing those three thousand converts on Pentecost.*

But for those valiant disciples meeting in the upper room in Jerusalem, the great Commander from the vaulted sky had said, "Go, and begin at Jerusalem." And out they went, right back into the same city where Satan thought he had dealt his supreme triumphant blow. To them, Jesus was more than a Saviour, he was their missionary Captain. And throughout the centuries, any disciple or church that has forgotten this feeling, or ignored this compelling command, has not taken up the cross of discipleship, for herein lies the very proof of true soldiership for Christ.

7. Why the disciples conquered against staggering odds.

An acute sense of urgency motivated the disciples to speak the Good News. The disciples felt that Jesus was returning very soon, even in their life. They felt they had precious little time to preach the message of salvation to the world and to warn all of God's impending judgment. At the ascension the angels spoke these words to those astonished men left gazing upward into heaven at the vanishing Jesus: "*This same Jesus which is taken away from you into heaven, shall so come in like manner as ye have seen him go into heaven.*"[16]

It seems evident from such statements as this from Jesus: "*There be some of you standing here, which shall not taste of death, til they have seen the kingdom of God come in power,*" and, "*This generation shall not pass, till all these things be fulfilled,*" that the Lord would return in short order to establish his church/kingdom.[17]

Had not the Lord himself said, "*The fields are white unto harvest?*" The time for reaping was present and Israel was not saved.[18] They must rush to save as many as possible before the Lord would come again. There could not be one moment for dallying. The Gospel must be preached to the whole creation in every nation before Jesus returned to render the kingdom up to the father. So they were driven along under the compulsion of love to carry out the Great Commission because they felt an extreme sense of compelling urgency. They had a wonderful gigantic task and were fighting against time.

Sadly, the church seems to have only a jaded sense of this great compulsion. Somehow there needs to be a rebirth of this early sense of urgency in our hearts. As the Old Testament writer once said, "*The king's business requires haste.*"[19] The church of Christ is not fully restored in spirit until we recapture the lost sense of urgency which they had to take the Gospel to the lost. While the Lord has delayed his coming for two thousand years, he will come at any moment, as a "*thief in the night,*" and in "*the twinkling of an eye.*" After all the years he has given us to prepare, he yet will find many sleeping as the foolish virgins in Matthew 25.

Their message was fraught with hope. They preached hope to a world grown weary of god's that were more sensual and licentious than humans themselves. They demonstrated a religion filled with spirit to a world that had been stifled with cold formalistic religions. They preached the God of great mercy and forgiveness to a world that had been overwhelmed with gods of vengeance and appeasement.

There was a radiant splendor, an amazing wonder in the heralders proclaiming glorious forgiveness for sins committed against the Creator of all mankind. The world had seen one religion after another whose messages were appeasement to prevent capital incrimination—religions that worshipped gods ready to inflict horrible vengeance.

There was something totally new and wondrous about the message of the apostles. God, by his matchless grace in Christ, was embracing the worst of penitent sinners on the mere grounds of faith in Jesus' Sonship of God. This had been proved by his resurrection from the dead.

When the Gospel message reached sinful ears, telling them that the one they had crucified had been raised from the dead

by the love and power of God, they cried aloud for instructions to rid themselves of their sins. Peter quickly revealed to them the way and manner by which they could be forgiven, saying: "*Repent, and be baptized, **every one of you** in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins, and ye shall receive the gift of the Holy Ghost.*"[20] This they did gladly, and about three thousand were added unto the kingdom that same day (Ac. 2:47).

Following this, they were to continue in the apostles' doctrine until the Lord's return. Stated here by Peter, and by others in related conversions in Acts, was concrete reality that there was a new start for wasted and weary lives. It was a new birth for those deadened by the evil of wickedness. What a beautiful message to proclaim to a world that had never heard anything like it before.

8. The disciples preached hope against the arch enemy of man—death.

No longer did the human race have to be needless slaves driven to the eternal confinement of the grave. Now, by the fact of the resurrection, men had been delivered by Christ! "*Who shall deliver me from the body of death,*" Paul shouted. Then he testified this message of hope to all: "*I thank God through Jesus Christ our Lord.*"[21]

What blessed good news! There was no longer any need to dread death. Man had been delivered from the fear of death by giving all believers victory over the grave by him who had become the "*first fruits of them that slept.*"[22] God was no longer a God that was afar off, remaining a mysterious secret hidden behind the temple veil that guarded the holy of holies. He was not, as Job said, a "spy upon all mankind" seeking the slightest excuse to condemn. Rather, in the Good News of Jesus, he was the God who in his son Jesus had loved man to his own death. He had sent his Son in loving kindness to seek out all who would avail themselves of his tender mercy through the atoning effects of the blood. God, in this act, had taken the full initiative as a faithful Father to search us out among the ruins of sin and lead us back to himself in safety. God now was seen more clearly in his character of matchless love and abounding grace.

This message overcame many when they beheld a God clearly distinct from the petty jealousies, bickerings and cruelties of the heathen gods. As a result of their new found knowledge, their cup of blessing gushed over within their souls, compelling them out of deep gratitude to share the beauty and glory of their salvation. What they had learned for themselves was immediately available for the entire world.

9. They preached Jesus Christ as Lord over their lives.

The Lordship of Jesus over the disciples' lives encompassed the whole of their faith and it was the constant topic of their preaching.[23] This was far more than the mere lip service which Jesus had condemned in Matthew 7:21 and Luke 6:46. The faith was alive in their hearts, not just uttered with their lips. It was not a second-hand religion passed down through a traditional family denomination which is so often the case today.

As Lord of their lives, Jesus had divine authority over everything they encountered. He was judge over all things. From the very first sermon on Pentecost, he had been proclaimed both Lord and Christ: "*God hath made that same Jesus whom ye have crucified both Lord and Christ.*"[24]

So they marched through Caesar's empire, *even into his palace* with the proclamation of Jesus' Lordship. The miracle that they escaped extinction preaching a Lord over Caesar is now a matter of record. Only by Divine Will could they have prevailed under such circumstances. "*If it be of God,*" Gamaliel advised, "*it cannot be*

overcome."[25] An empire whose mailed fist no nation could withstand would be eventually conquered from within by a small band of dedicated disciples preaching the power of his resurrection. Jesus Christ was Lord over all, *including Caesar.*

Many of them suffered unimaginable hardships. *Fox's Book of Martyrs* contains graphic accounts of many. But the church won. Uncompromising as Christianity was, it was eventually tolerated by Constantine's celebrated edict of toleration in 311 A.D. By this act the Emperor fulfilled his pledge to God to recognize Christianity as the state religion for helping him win the battle of Milvian Bridge.

Today we have a great privilege to publicly proclaim on international media Jesus Christ as Lord. They would have thought such freedom as we take for granted miraculous indeed. They met secretly and advertised their meetings by secret symbols etched nervously in the walls of building, on street curbs, or drawn quietly in the dust while no state official was looking.

We should ever be conscious that our wonderful privilege of freedom of worship has been bought by the blood of martyrs. May we give thanks to the Almighty for the magnitude of blessings we enjoy this moment. It should also be sobering to recall our Lord's words: "*to whom much is given, much shall be required.*"[26]

Let us all remember that the exact confession made by believers today is made without any fear of reprisal, but it brought extreme persecution to our forefathers in the faith. Truly, we are warming ourselves by a fire we did not build.

10. They preached Jesus as King—presently reigning.

To this end Jesus said he had come into the world .[27] His rejection by the Jews as the Messiah of promise signified their complete abandonment of Jehovah's predetermined will in Jesus to save Israel. A remnant of faithful Israelites did believe, as Paul affirms.

In Romans 9:27 the apostle teaches that the promises were made to faithful Israel, *not Israel according to the flesh.* Israel stumbled at this precise point. The promise made to Abraham that through his seed all nations of the earth would be blessed was made on the basis of faith, not of fleshly lineage (Gen. 15:4). When Jesus discovered that the faith of Abraham was found more prominently among the Gentiles than the Jews, he marvelled and said the Gentiles would be accepted by faith into the kingdom of heaven (Matt. 8:10). Likewise, Paul told the Galatian Gentiles they had been adopted into the family of Abraham on the basis of their obedient faith.[28]

The climatic slaying of Jesus by his own fleshly family of Jews caused them to ignorantly fulfill their own law and nail it to the cross.[29] It also was the blow that crushed the head of the viper. Satan thought he saw his chance to destroy every living soul by putting to death the Son of God. This, he thought, would gain for himself the whole world, thus vindicating his cynical accusations against man to Jehovah. God, however, caught Satan in his own craftiness by using Jesus' death to set free all the captives in Satan's dominion. God's love and grace, by paying the law's penalty of man's death for sin, was magnificently realized by Jesus' blood. Their diabolical deed proved to be the key of deliverance for all mankind.

Someone has referred to this as much like a solemn chess match between the powers of Light and Darkness. The Prince of Darkness seeing what looked like a checkmate for the single opposing king left on the board, exclaims, "It's over! The game is mine." He gleefully makes his play only to learn that he bragged too soon; for his prize play opened a move for his opponent hitherto unseen by him that spelled his sudden defeat.

Satan played his trump card at the cross but his exultant play opened a fountain

filled with Christ's atoning blood. At once the capturer lost his dominion and became captive himself. Satan had gambled all to out-god God and had lost. The extermination of Jesus would have given him all creation forever by preventing the establishment of the kingdom of heaven.

When Satan murdered Jesus he unwittingly unleashed God's secret weapon which remains undisclosed to Satan's depraved mind to this day: *the mystery of the grace of God through Jesus Christ our Lord.* This forgiving love that spares the penitent sinner from death while dealing justly with the penalty of sin was inconceivable to Satan. How far past finding out are the ways of God! How wonderful is the grace that saves us! Satan believed once the human race was damned, it would always be damned. He ignored the fact that there remained in man a spark of the divine image lingering there from the Stone from which he had been hewn,[30] and that an act of divine love for man would be the needed spark to rekindle his love for his Creator.

Even though man has sorely sinned against God, he can yet be touched by the loving words of his Father's care. The grace of God, plus man's faith, is the availing combination to eternal life. This heaven/earth combination is the detonator of the great dynamite of God's word: the power that blows open the strong defensive doors which we have erected against his will (Rom. 1:16).

The one sure thing that always renders Satan helpless is love. There are few barricades that love cannot remove and few redoubts that love and joy cannot scale. Jesus is the King of all who surrender to his will. He sets up his dominion in every believer's heart from which he rules over their lives. This is the kingdom "*that cometh not with observation,*" for the kingdom is within man.[31] It occupies not now, nor will it ever, a material throne on earth. His reign from the invisible throne room deep within a believer's heart is the new throne of David from which righteousness and mercy reign forever. Those who receive citizenship in this kingdom by being born of the water and of the Spirit (Jno. 3:3-5), are now looking for the return of the king who has gone for a while into a far country.[32]

Any moment he will fulfill the words of his second coming: "*Then cometh the end, when he shall have delivered up the kingdom to God, even the Father; when he shall have put down all rule and all authority and power. For he must reign, til he has put all enemies under his feet.*"[33]

"A widespread lack of confidence in Christ's sufficiency is threatening the contemporary church. Too many have tacitly acquiesced to the notion that our riches in Christ, including scripture, prayer, the indwelling of the Holy Spirit, and all other resources we find in Christ simply are not adequate to meet people's needs. Entire churches are committed to programs built on the presupposition that the apostle's teaching fellowship, the breaking of bread and prayer are not a full enough agenda for the church as it prepares to enter the complex and sophisticated world of the twenty-first century . . . the failure of modern Christians to understand and appreciate the riches of Christ has opened the door to all kinds of aberrant influences. Bad doctrine, legalism, libertinism, humanism and secularism, to name a few, are eroding the foundations of the Christian faith."[34]

References

1. Luke 23:28-31
2. Hebrews 10:4; 10:26ff.
3. II John 10ff.
4. Revelation 22:18-19
5. Daniel 7:22; Matt. 28:18ff.
6. Acts 1:6-8; Acts 2; I Corinthians 15:25
7. Acts 9
8. Colossians 1:8; Ephesians 1:22-23
9. Matthew 28:18-20
10. II Corinthians 3:5-6
11. John 6:66-67
12. Revelation 3:1ff.
13. Mark 16:15ff.
14. Acts 1:8
15. Luke 24:47 RSV
16. Acts 1:11
17. Matthew 16:18
18. Jeremiah 8:20
19. I Samuel 21:8
20. Acts 2:37-38; 47
21. Romans 7:24-25
22. I Corinthians 15:20
23. I Corinthians 4:5
24. Acts 2:36
25. Acts 5:39
26. Luke 12:48
27. John 18:37
28. Galatians 3:26ff.
29. Colossians 2:14
30. Genesis 1:26
31. Luke 17:20
32. Matthew 21:33
33. I Corinthians 15:24-26
34. J. R. MacArthur, *Our Sufficiency in Christ,* (Dallas, Word Publishing), p. 9.
    A timely quote from a conservative Baptist minister expressing his thoughts on the liberal trend of Christian thought.

Supplementary Readings

Andrews, Samuel J. *The Life of Our Lord Upon Earth.* New and Revised Edition. New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1893.

Bartlet, James Vernon. *The Apostolic Age in Ten Epochs of Church History.* Vol. I. New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1900.

Bruce, F. F. *The Acts of the Apostles.* Grand Rapids, Mich.: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1952

Rackham, Richard B. *The Acts of the Apostles. Twelfth Edition:* London: Methuen and Co., Ltd., 1939.

Questions for Chapter Twenty-two

1. How do the writers of the New Testament reflect the finishing work of Jesus was only the beginning?
2. How was the work of Jesus different after Calvary and the resurrection?
3. What were some of the problems facing the early church?
4. What made the disciples sufficient to their great hindrances?
5. Discuss the things that characterized the preaching in the early church.
6. How did God catch Satan in his own craftiness?

Notes

Notes

Notes

Notes

Notes

Notes